

# CHINA (INCLUDES TIBET, XINJIANG, HONG KONG, AND MACAU) 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

Reports on Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Macau are appended at the end of this report.

The constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC), which cites the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), states that citizens "enjoy freedom of religious belief" but limits protections for religious practice to "normal religious activities," without defining "normal." The government recognizes five official religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism. Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned "patriotic religious associations" representing these religions are permitted to register with the government and officially permitted to hold worship services, although other groups reported meeting unofficially. CCP members and members of the armed forces are required to be atheists and are forbidden from engaging in religious practices. National law prohibits organizations or individuals from interfering with the state educational system for minors younger than the age of 18, effectively barring them from participating in most religious activities or receiving religious education. Some provinces have additional laws precluding minors' participation in religious activities. The government continued to assert control over religion and to restrict the activities and personal freedom of religious adherents that it perceived as threatening state or CCP interests, according to religious groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and international media reports. NGOs and media continued to report deaths in custody and that the government tortured, physically abused, arrested, disappeared, detained, sentenced to prison, subjected to forced labor and forced indoctrination in CCP ideology, and harassed adherents of both registered and unregistered religious groups for activities related to their religious beliefs and practices. The NGO Human Rights Without Frontiers estimated the government imprisoned 2,987 individuals for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief as of December 7. According to *Minghui*, a Falun Gong-affiliated publication, 101 Falun Gong practitioners died during the year as a result of persecution of their faith, compared with 107 in 2020, and both *Minghui* and the Falun Dafa Infocenter reported police arrested more than 5,000 practitioners and harassed more than 9,000 others. According to the annual report of The Church of Almighty God (CAG), authorities arrested more than 11,156 of its members and subjected them to physical abuse, including beatings, sleep deprivation, and being forced into stress positions, resulting in the death of at least

nine individuals. There were reports the government pressured individuals to renounce their religious beliefs. The government continued its multiyear campaign of “Sinicization” to bring all religious doctrine and practice in line with CCP doctrine, which included requiring clergy of all faiths to attend political indoctrination sessions and suggesting content for sermons that emphasized loyalty to the CCP and the state. The State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) issued regulations, effective May 1, entitled “Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy,” requires all clergy to pledge allegiance to the CCP and socialism and created a database of “religious personnel” to track their performance. Authorities did not issue a “clergy card” to individuals not belonging to one of the five officially recognized patriotic religious associations, including pastors of Protestant house churches, Catholic clergy who rejected the government’s 2018 provisional agreement with the Holy See and refused to join the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), teachers and clergy at independent mosques and Buddhist and Taoist temples, rabbis, and religious personnel of new religious movements. The SARA issued new regulations on September 1 that require all religious schools to teach Xi Jinping Thought and adhere to the “Sinicization of religion.” The government prohibited private tutors, including those based abroad, from using textbooks “propagating religious teachings” and closed several informal, religiously affiliated schools.

During the year, officials across the country shut down religious venues, including some that were affiliated with the authorized patriotic religious associations, in some but not all cases citing COVID-19 restrictions. The government intensified its campaign against religious groups it characterized as “cults,” including the CAG, maintained a ban on other groups, such as Falun Gong, and conducted propaganda campaigns against *xie jiao* (literally “heterodox teachings”) aimed at school-age children. Authorities limited online worship. Authorities continued to restrict the printing and distribution of the Bible, the Quran, and other religious literature, and penalized businesses that copied and published religious materials. The government removed religious apps from app stores and censored religious content from the popular messaging service WeChat. Authorities censored online posts referencing Jesus or the Bible and there were continued reports that authorities destroyed public displays of religious symbols throughout the country. The government continued to remove architectural features that identified some churches and mosques as religious sites and removed crosses from private property. The SARA’s “Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy” made no provision for the Holy See to have a role in the selection of Catholic bishops, despite the 2018 provisional agreement between the Vatican and the government concerning the appointment of bishops. At a national conference on religious

affairs in December, President and CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping called on religious personnel and government officials to “uphold and develop a religious theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics.”

Christians, Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, and Falun Gong practitioners reported severe societal discrimination in employment, housing, and business opportunities. International media reported growing anti-Muslim sentiment in society as a result of the government’s Sinicization campaign.

The Charge d’Affaires and other U.S. embassy and consulate general officials met with a range of government officials to advocate for greater religious freedom and tolerance, and for the release of individuals imprisoned for religious reasons. The Charge and other embassy and consulate general officials met with members of registered and unregistered religious groups, family members of religious prisoners, NGOs, and others to reinforce U.S. support for religious freedom. The embassy continued to amplify Department of State religious freedom initiatives and advocacy directly to Chinese citizens through outreach programs and social media. The U.S. Secretary of State, Charge, and other State Department and embassy officials issued public statements, including via social media, supporting religious freedom and condemning the PRC’s violations of the rights of religious minorities. The U.S. Secretary of State, Deputy Secretary of State, Charge d’Affaires, and other senior State Department officials and embassy and consulate general representatives repeatedly and publicly expressed concerns about abuses of religious freedom in China, Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjiang. On January 19, the then Secretary of State determined that since at least March 2017, the PRC has committed genocide and crimes against humanity against Uyghurs, who are predominantly Muslim, and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang. On January 13, U.S. Customs and Border Protection issued a Withhold Release Order that prohibited the import of all cotton and tomato products produced in Xinjiang. On March 22, the U.S. Department of Treasury sanctioned two officials under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. On May 12, the Secretary of State announced visa restrictions against a PRC government official for his involvement in gross violations of human rights against Falun Gong practitioners. On June 24, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), U.S. Department of Commerce, and U.S. Department of Labor took action against companies in the polysilicon industry using forced labor of religious and ethnic minorities in Xinjiang. On July 9, the U.S. Commerce Department added to the Entities List 14 Chinese electronics and technology firms and other businesses for helping enable “Beijing’s campaign of repression, mass detention, and high-technology surveillance” against Muslim minorities in Xinjiang. On July 13, the

U.S. Departments of State, Treasury, Commerce, Homeland Security, and Labor, and the U.S. Trade Representative issued an updated Xinjiang Supply Chain Business Advisory that highlighted for businesses with potential supply chain and investment links to Xinjiang the risk of complicity with forced labor and human rights abuses. On December 6, the Presidential press secretary announced the United States would not send diplomatic or official representation to the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic or Paralympic Games because of human rights abuses in China. On December 10, the U.S. Department of State imposed visa restrictions on four current and former PRC officials for complicity with human rights violations in Xinjiang, and the U.S. Department of Treasury also sanctioned two officials and one company. On December 23, the President signed the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act.

Since 1999, China has been designated as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On November 15, 2021, the Secretary of State redesignated China as a CPC and identified the following sanction that accompanied the designation: the existing ongoing restriction on exports to China of crime control and detection instruments and equipment, under the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1990 and 1991 (Public Law 101-246), pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 1.4 billion (midyear 2021). According to the State Council Information Office (SCIO) report *Seeking Happiness for People: 70 Years of Progress on Human Rights in China*, published in September 2019, there are more than 200 million religious adherents in the country. An SCIO April 2018 white paper on religion in the country states there are approximately 5,500 religious groups.

Local and regional figures for the number of religious followers, including those belonging to the five officially recognized religions, are unclear. Local governments do not release these statistics, and even official religious organizations do not have accurate numbers. The Pew Research Center and other observers say the numbers of adherents of many religious groups often are underreported. The U.S. government estimates that Buddhists comprise 18.2 percent of the country’s total population, Christians 5.1 percent, Muslims 1.8 percent, followers of folk religions 21.9 percent, and atheists or unaffiliated persons 52.2 percent, with Hindus, Jews, and Taoists comprising less than 1

percent. According to a February 2017 estimate by the U.S.-based NGO Freedom House, there are more than 350 million religious adherents in the country, including 185 to 250 million Buddhists, 60 to 80 million Protestants, 21 to 23 million Muslims, seven to 20 million Falun Gong practitioners, 12 million Roman Catholics, six to eight million Tibetan Buddhists, and hundreds of millions who follow various folk traditions. According to Boston University's 2020 World Religion Database, there are 499 million folk and ethnic religionists (34 percent), 474 million agnostics (33 percent), 228 million Buddhists (16 percent), 106 million Christians (7.4 percent), 100 million atheists (7 percent), 23.7 million Muslims (1.7 percent), and other religions adherents who together constitute less than 1 percent of the population, including 5.9 million Taoists, 1.8 million Confucians, 20,500 Sikhs, and 2,900 Jews. According to the Christian advocacy NGO Open Doors USA's *World Watch List 2022* report, there are 96.7 million Christians. According to 2015 data from the World Jewish Congress, the country's Jewish population is 2,500, concentrated in Beijing, Shanghai, and Kaifeng.

The SCIO's April 2018 white paper found the number of Protestants to be 38 million. Among these, there are 20 million Protestants affiliated with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), the state-sanctioned umbrella organization for all officially recognized Protestant churches, according to information on TSPM's website in March 2017. The SCIO report states there are six million Catholics, although media and international NGO estimates suggest there are 10-12 million, approximately half of whom practice in churches not affiliated with the CCPA. Accurate estimates on the numbers of Catholics and Protestants, as well as other faiths, are difficult to calculate because many adherents practice exclusively at home or in churches that are not state sanctioned.

According to the 2018 SCIO white paper, there are 10 ethnic minority groups totaling more than 20 million persons for whom Islam is the majority religion. Other sources indicate almost all Muslims are Sunni. The two largest Muslim ethnic minorities are Hui and Uyghur, with Hui Muslims concentrated primarily in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and in Qinghai, Gansu, and Yunnan Provinces. The SARA, also referred to as the National Religious Affairs Administration, estimates the Muslim Hui population at 10.6 million. A June report on the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang) issued by the Department of Population and Employment Statistics of the PRC's National Bureau of Statistics estimates the total population in Xinjiang is 26 million. The report states Uyghurs, along with ethnic Kazakh, Hui, Kyrgyz, and members of other predominantly Muslim ethnic minority groups, number approximately 15 million residents, or 58 percent of the total population there.

While there is no reliable government breakdown of the Buddhist population by school, the vast majority of Buddhists are adherents of Mahayana Buddhism, according to the Pew Research Center. Most ethnic Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism, although a sizeable minority practices Bon, a pre-Buddhist indigenous religion.

Prior to the government's 1999 ban on Falun Gong, the government estimated there were 70 million adherents. Falun Gong sources estimate tens of millions continue to practice privately, and Freedom House estimates there are seven to 20 million practitioners.

Some ethnic minorities follow traditional religions, such as Dongba among the Naxi people in Yunnan Province and Buluotuo among the Zhuang in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The central government classifies worship of Mazu, a folk deity with Taoist roots, as an expression of "cultural heritage" rather than a religious practice.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution, which cites the leadership of the CCP and the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong and Xi Jinping Thought, states citizens "enjoy freedom of religious belief," but it limits protections for religious practice to "normal religious activities," without defining normal. It states religion may not be used to disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the educational system. The constitution provides for the right to hold or not to hold a religious belief. It says state organs, public organizations, and individuals may not discriminate against citizens "who believe in or do not believe in any religion." The constitution states, "Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination."

The law does not allow individuals or groups to take legal action against the government based on the religious freedom protections afforded by the constitution. Criminal law allows the state to sentence government officials to up to two years in prison if they violate a citizen's religious freedom.

The government recognizes five official religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism. Regulations require religious organizations to

register with the government. Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned religious associations are permitted to register, and only these organizations may legally hold worship services. The five associations, which operate under the direction of the CCP's United Front Work Department (UFWD), are the Buddhist Association of China, the Chinese Taoist Association, the Islamic Association of China, the TSPM, and the CCPA. Other religious groups, such as Protestant groups unaffiliated with the official TSPM or Catholics professing loyalty to the Holy See but not affiliated with the CCPA, are not permitted to register as legal entities. The law does not provide a mechanism for religious groups independent of the five official patriotic religious associations to obtain legal status.

The CCP is responsible for creating religious regulations and oversees the UFWD, which in turn manages the SARA's functions and responsibilities. The SARA is responsible for implementing the CCP's religious regulations and administers the provincial and local bureaus of religious affairs.

On January 18, the SARA issued new regulations, effective May 1, entitled "Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy." The regulations require all clergy to pledge allegiance to the CCP and socialism and to create a database of "religious personnel" to track their performance. Article 3 of the regulations states religious clergy "should love the motherland, support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, support the socialist system, abide by the constitution, laws, regulations, and rules, practice the core values of socialism, adhere to the principle of independent and self-administered religion in China, adhere to the direction of the Sinicization of religion in China, and operate to maintain national unity, religious harmony, and social stability." Article 6 states, in part, clergy should "resist illegal religious activities and religious extremist ideology, and resist infiltration by foreign forces using religion." The regulations also provide that "entrance to religious places of worship should be regulated through strict gatekeeping, verification of identity, and registration." The regulations also stipulate that authorities will hold religious organizations and institutions responsible for the behavior of individual religious clergy. Article 7 stipulates religious staff should "focus on improving their own quality, improving their cultural and moral literacy, studying the contents of doctrines and regulations that are conducive to social harmony, progress of the times, and health and civilization, and integrate them into preaching, and play a role in promoting the Sinicization of religion in our country."

The Counterterrorism Law describes “religious extremism” as the ideological basis of terrorism and states religious extremism uses “distorted religious teachings or other means to incite hatred or discrimination, or advocate violence.”

Authorities require CCP members and members of the armed forces to be atheists and forbid them from engaging in religious practices. Members found to belong to religious organizations are subject to expulsion, although these rules are not universally enforced. The vast majority of public office holders are CCP members, and membership is widely considered a prerequisite for success in a government career. These restrictions on religious belief and practice also apply to retired CCP members.

The law bans certain religious or spiritual groups. Criminal law defines banned groups as “cult [xie jiao, literally ‘heterodox teachings’] organizations” and provides for criminal prosecution of individuals belonging to such groups and punishment of up to life in prison. There are no published criteria for determining, or procedures for challenging, such a designation. A national security law also explicitly bans cult organizations.

The CCP maintains an extralegal, party-run security apparatus to eliminate the Falun Gong movement and other organizations. The government considers Falun Gong an “illegal organization.” The government continues to ban the Guanyin Method religious group (Guanyin Famen or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy) and Zhong Gong (a *qigong* exercise discipline). The government also characterizes a number of Christian groups as “cult organizations,” including the Shouters, CAG (also known as Eastern Lightning), Society of Disciples (Mentu Hui), Full Scope Church (Quan Fanwei Jiaohui), Spirit Sect, New Testament Church, Three Grades of Servants (San Ban Puren), Association of Disciples, Established King Church, Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church), Family of Love, and South China Church.

According to regulations, in order to register, religious organizations must submit information about the organization’s historical background, members, doctrines, key publications, minimum funding requirements, and government sponsor, which must be one of the five state-sanctioned religious associations. Registration information is required only once, but religious organizations must reregister if changes are made to the required documentation.

Under revisions to the civil code passed by the National People’s Congress in 2020, a religious institution established according to law may apply for the status

of a “legal person” (nonprofit entity) under Article 92 of the civil code. The revisions formalize the ability of organizations to possess property, publish approved materials, train staff, and collect donations, thereby facilitating authorities’ ability to track and regulate religious institutions.

Religious and other regulations permit official patriotic religious associations to engage in activities such as building places of worship, training religious leaders, publishing literature, and providing social services to local communities. The CCP’s UFWD, including the SARA, and the Ministry of Civil Affairs provide policy guidance and supervision on the implementation of these regulations.

Revisions to the Regulations on Religious Affairs in 2018 increased restrictions on unregistered religious groups. Individuals who participate in unsanctioned religious activities are subject to criminal and administrative penalties. The regulations stipulate that any form of income from illegal activities or illegal properties shall be confiscated and a fine imposed of between one to three times the value of the illegal income or properties. If the illegal income or properties cannot be identified, officials impose a fine of less than 50,000 renminbi (RMB) (\$7,800). Authorities may penalize property owners renting space to unregistered religious groups by confiscating properties and illegal incomes and levying fines between RMB 20,000 and 200,000 (\$3,100-\$31,400).

Government policy allows religious groups to engage in charitable work, but regulations specifically prohibit faith-based organizations from proselytizing while conducting charitable activities. Authorities require faith-based charities, like all other charitable groups, to register with the government. Once they are registered as official charities, authorities allow them to raise funds publicly and to receive tax benefits. The government does not permit unregistered charitable groups to raise funds openly, hire employees, open bank accounts, or own property. According to several unregistered religious groups, the government requires faith-based charities to obtain official cosponsorship of their registration application by the local official religious affairs bureau. Authorities often require these groups to affiliate with one of the five state-sanctioned religious associations.

The Regulations on Religious Affairs require members of religious groups to seek approval to travel abroad for “religious training, conferences, pilgrimages, and other activities.” Anyone found organizing such activities without approval may be fined between RMB 20,000 and 200,000 (\$3,100-\$31,400). Illegally obtained income connected to such travel may be seized and, “if the case constitutes a crime, criminal responsibility shall be investigated according to law.”

The regulations specify that no religious structure, including clerical housing, may be transferred, mortgaged, or utilized as an investment. SARA regulations place restrictions on religious groups conducting business or making investments by stipulating the property and income of religious groups, schools, and venues must not be distributed and should be used for activities and charities befitting their purposes; any individual or organization that donates funds to build religious venues is prohibited from owning the venues.

The regulations impose a limit on foreign donations to religious groups, stating such donations must be used for activities that authorities deem appropriate for the group and the site. Regulations state that any donations exceeding RMB 100,000 (\$15,700) must be submitted to the local government for review and approval. Religious groups, religious schools, and “religious activity sites” may not accept donations from foreign sources that have conditions attached.

The regulations require that religious activity “must not harm national security” or support “religious extremism.” The regulations do not define “extremism.” Measures to safeguard national unity and respond to “religious extremism” include monitoring groups, individuals, and institutions. Penalties for “harm to national security” may include suspending groups and canceling the credentials of clergy.

National laws allow each provincial administration to issue its own regulations concerning religious affairs, including penalties for violations. Many provinces updated their regulations after the national 2018 regulations came into effect. In addition to the five officially recognized religions, local governments, at their discretion, may permit followers of certain unregistered religions to carry out religious practices.

By law, prison inmates have the right to believe in a religion and maintain their religious faith while in custody, but not a right to exercise their faith, such as by accessing prayer facilities or meeting with clergy. Muslim prisoners are reportedly allowed to have meals with the “halal” label.

The law does not define what constitutes proselytizing. The constitution states that no state unit, social organization, or individual may force a citizen to believe or not believe in a religion. Offenders are subject to administrative and criminal penalties.

An amendment to the criminal law and a judicial interpretation by the national Supreme People's Procuratorate and the Supreme People's Court published in 2016 criminalize the act of forcing others to wear "extremist" garments or symbols; doing so is punishable by up to three years' imprisonment, short-term detention, or controlled release, as well as a concurrent fine. Neither the amendment nor the judicial interpretation defines what garments or symbols the law considers "extremist."

Publication and distribution of literature containing religious content must follow guidelines determined by the State Publishing Administration. Publication of religious material must also conform to guidelines determined by the Propaganda Department of the CCP Central Committee. Online activities ("online religious information services") of religious groups require prior approval from the provincial religious affairs bureau. Religious texts published without authorization, including Bibles, Qurans, and Buddhist and Taoist texts, may be confiscated, and unauthorized publishing houses closed.

In December, the government published new regulations to limit online religious content. The Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services, set to go into effect on March 1, 2022, would prohibit overseas organizations and individuals from operating online religious information services in the country.

The government offers some subsidies for the construction of state-sanctioned places of worship and religious schools.

To establish places of worship, religious organizations must first receive approval from the religious affairs department of the local government when the facility is proposed, and again before services are first held at that location. Religious organizations must submit dozens of documents to register during these approval processes, including detailed management plans of their religious activities, exhaustive financial records, and personal information on all staff members. Religious communities not going through the formal registration process may not legally have a set facility or worship meeting space. Therefore, every time such groups want to reserve a space for worship, such as by renting a hotel room or an apartment, they must seek a separate approval from government authorities for that specific service. Worshipping in a space without prior approval, gained either through the formal registration process or by seeking an approval for each service, is considered an illegal religious activity and is subject to criminal or administrative penalties.

By regulation, if a religious structure is to be demolished or relocated because of city planning or the construction of “key” projects, the party responsible for demolishing the structure must consult with its local bureau of religious affairs (guided by the SARA) and the religious group using the structure. If all parties agree to the demolition, the party conducting the demolition must agree to rebuild the structure or to provide compensation equal to its appraised market value.

The Regulations on Religious Affairs include registration requirements for schools that allow only the five state-sanctioned religious associations or their affiliates to form religious schools. Children younger than the age of 18 are prohibited from participating in religious activities and receiving religious education, even in schools run by religious organizations. One regulation states that no individual may use religion to hinder the national education system and that no religious activities may be held in schools. The law mandates the teaching of atheism in schools, and a CCP directive provides guidance to universities on how to prevent foreign proselytizing of university students. The SARA also issued new regulations on September 1 entitled “Administrative Measures for Religious Schools” that stipulate religious schools should ensure CCP ideological training is included in all religious education, including required classes on Xi Jinping Thought, ideological and political theory, and socialism.

The Regulations on Religious Affairs of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region state, “Minors shall not participate in religious activities. No organization or individual may organize, induce or force minors to participate in religious activities.” Minors are also prohibited from entering religious venues. Multiple provinces send letters instructing parents that “teachers and parents should strictly enforce the principle of separation between education and religion and ensure that minors are not allowed to enter religious places, participate in religious activities, or to attend religious trainings.” Individuals, including parents, who violate these regulations may be criminally liable. Implementation of these rules, however, varies greatly across and within regions.

On September 1, the Ministry of Education published the “Administrative Measures for Off-campus Training Materials for Primary and Secondary School Students.” “Off-campus training” refers to private tutoring services designed to help students prepare for entrance exams. The regulations prohibit private tutors, including those based abroad, from using textbooks “propagating religious teachings, doctrines, canons, or xie jiao, or feudal superstitions, etc.”

The law states job applicants shall not face discrimination in hiring based on religious belief.

In 2020, the Administrative Measures for Religious Groups went into effect. These measures comprise six chapters and 41 articles dealing with the organization, function, offices, supervision, projects, and economic administration of communities and groups at the national and local levels. The measures state that only registered groups may operate legally and stipulate that religious organizations must support the leadership of the CCP, adhere to the direction of Sinicization, and implement the values of socialism. Article 17 states that religious organizations shall “follow the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, abide by laws, regulations, rules, and policies, correctly handle the relationship between national law and canon, and enhance national awareness, awareness of the rule of law, and citizenship.”

The country is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). With respect to Macau, the central government notified the UN Secretary-General, in part, that residents of Macau shall not be restricted in the rights and freedoms they are entitled to unless otherwise provided for by law, and in case of restrictions, the restrictions shall not contravene the ICCPR. With respect to Hong Kong, the central government notified the Secretary-General, in part, that the ICCPR would also apply to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

### **Government Practices**

Authorities continued to arrest and otherwise detain leaders and members of religious groups, often those connected with groups not registered with the state-sanctioned religious associations. Authorities reportedly used vague or insubstantial charges, sometimes in connection with religious activity, to convict and sentence leaders and members of religious groups to years in prison.

NGOs, religious groups, and media sources continued to report deaths in custody, enforced disappearances (often through “residential surveillance at a designated location” – a form of black-site detention utilized by authorities against individuals accused of endangering state security), and organ harvesting in prison of individuals whom authorities targeted based on their religious beliefs or affiliation. NGOs and media reported authorities used violence during arrests and tortured detainees, including by forcing them to maintain stress positions, beating them, and

depriving them of food, water, and sleep. NGOs reported that some previously detained individuals were denied freedom of movement even after their release.

The NGO Human Rights Without Frontiers estimated that the government imprisoned 2,987 individuals for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief as of December 7.

The Political Prisoner Database of the human rights NGO Dui Hua Foundation counted 3,793 individuals imprisoned as of September 30 for “unorthodox” religious beliefs, including 2,751 Falun Gong practitioners, 578 CAG members, and 147 members of other Protestant groups.

*Minghui* reported 101 Falun Gong practitioners died as a result of persecution suffered because of their faith, compared with 107 in 2020. It also reported that authorities arrested 5,045 (8,160 in 2020) and harassed 9,245 (10,973 in 2020) Falun Gong practitioners during the year. The Falun Dafa Infocenter reported police arrested more than 5,000 practitioners and harassed more than 9,000 others during the year.

*Minghui* stated police often used violence during arrests of Falun Gong practitioners and that individuals were tortured in custody. Police in Anyang City, Henan Province, arrested shopkeeper Li Xianxi on May 11 for talking about Falun Gong in a market. When he performed Falun Gong exercises at the local detention center following his arrest, authorities handcuffed and shackled him. On June 13, authorities informed his family that Li had died on June 12. According to those who saw his body, he was emaciated, his head was swollen, and there were injuries to his back and knees.

*Bitter Winter*, an online publication that tracks religious liberty and human rights abuses in the country, reported that on April 12, authorities informed the family of Colonel Gong Piqui, a Falun Gong practitioner and former deputy chief of staff of the Shandong Provincial Reserve Artillery Division, that Gong had died in prison. He had been forced to retire when authorities discovered he was a practitioner. Authorities arrested Gong in 2017 and sentenced him in 2018 to seven and a half years and a fine of RMB 20,000 (\$3,100) for being active in a banned religious group. According to authorities, Gong experienced a “sudden cerebral hemorrhage” and died despite receiving medical treatment. His family and friends reported seeing signs of torture on his body, causing them to doubt he died of natural causes.

*Minghui* reported that Hubei Province resident Hu Hanjiao died in prison while serving a four-year sentence for practicing Falun Gong. Authorities arrested Hu on March 15 for talking to people about Falun Gong and the Xiaochang County Court sentenced her in late June. During the seven months authorities held her at the Hanchuan City Detention Center, Hu staged a hunger strike in protest and was force fed. Thirteen days after she was transferred to the Hubei Province Women's Prison, prison authorities called Hu's husband to inform him she had died. They refused to release her body to her family.

In June, *Bitter Winter* reported that government and police officers confirmed that, in the context of the 100th anniversary of the CCP's founding, the government ordered increased arrests for members of all dissident groups, particularly CAG members. One document issued by the Office of State Security in Shanxi Province ordered officials to "put real efforts to strengthen surveillance over key personnel and carry out a severe crackdown on The Church of Almighty God." According to *Bitter Winter*, authorities throughout the country arrested more than 1,000 CAG members in the first half of the year. From May 19 to 25, Guangdong Province police arrested approximately 160 CAG members in Foshan, Guangzhou, Zhuhai, and other cities. Authorities also arrested 403 CAG members in Shanxi Province from the beginning of the year through June, and at least 265 CAG members in Henan Province from mid-April to mid-June. In April, the government in Anhui Province arrested at least 116 CAG members after a long-term surveillance and tracking operation and confiscated at least RMB 750,000 (\$118,000) of church and personal assets.

During the year, *Bitter Winter* reported on several cases of authorities imprisoning CAG members, pressuring them to sign statements renouncing their faith, and subjecting them to psychological and physical abuse, including beatings and stress positions, when they refused. One CAG member from the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region said during his imprisonment, a guard tightly wrapped a copper wire as thick as a little finger around his body five times, cutting off his circulation. After authorities forced him to stand for four hours, the man's legs became swollen, his hands were numb and trembling, and his abdomen became numb to the touch. One CAG member from Anhui Province said authorities forced her into a stress position eight hours a day for five consecutive days during which she had to squat while keeping her torso upright, her hands raised above her head, and her body unmoving. Another CAG member reported being deprived of sleep for five nights. Two CAG members said when they refused to sign a statement renouncing their faith, guards encouraged fellow inmates to beat them,

resulting in bruises and broken teeth. Another CAG member described fellow prisoners, at the guards' instigation, smearing feces on his body.

In April, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported authorities in Sichuan Province detained members of Christian house churches in unofficial detention facilities where they pressured individuals to renounce their faith. One Protestant individual said authorities held him in a windowless basement for eight or nine months, during which time they physically and mentally abused him. He said, "You can't see the sun, so you lose all concept of time," and that suicidal thoughts and self-harm among detainees were commonplace. Secret police attempted to coerce inmates into signing confessions of guilt and held those who refused in solitary confinement for prolonged periods. Another Christian told RFA that similar facilities were being used to abuse members of the underground Catholic Church and Falun Gong practitioners.

According to the annual report released by the CAG, during the year, at least 68,456 Church members were directly persecuted by authorities, compared with at least 42,807 in 2020. The report stated that authorities harassed at least 57,300 Church members (at least 35,752 in 2020), arrested 11,156 (7,055 in 2020), detained 3,636 (4,045 in 2020), tortured or subjected to forced indoctrination 6,125 (5,587 in 2020), sentenced 1,452 (1,098 in 2020), and seized at least RMB 250 million (\$39.23 million) in Church and personal assets. At least nine Church members died as a result of being physically abused during detention (at least 21 in 2020).

The NGO ChinaAid reported that on May 23, police in Guiyang, Guizhou Province, arrested Pastor Yang Hua of the Guiyang Living Stone Church for conducting religious activities. At the station, leaders of the Guiyang Yunyan District Party Committee reportedly struck Yang, causing injuries that required medical attention.

Media reported authorities used measures ostensibly intended to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including facial recognition software and telephone tracking, to identify and arrest members of unregistered or banned religious groups. The government installed surveillance cameras outside unregistered churches during the pandemic.

*Bitter Winter* reported that on June 7, the Qinnan District People's Court in Qin Zhou City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, sentenced 21 members of the Blood and Water of Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit Full Gospel Evangelistic Group to

prison for being active in a cult. They were part of a group of Church members detained by the Qinnan Branch of the Qinzhou Public Security Bureau in August 2020. Police also seized 113 books, 989 loose “propaganda materials,” 183 CDs, 3 calendars, 2 diaries, and 48 signs, among other items. The movement was founded in Taiwan and the government declared it a cult in 1995.

According to *Minghui*, police arrested and harassed Falun Gong practitioners throughout the country. Harassment spiked in April and May, around the “sensitive dates” of April 25, the anniversary of 10,000 Falun Gong practitioners’ appealing in 1999 outside the central government compound for the right to practice their beliefs, and May 13, the 29th anniversary of Falun Gong’s introduction to the public. According to *Minghui*, harassment was also driven by the “stability maintenance” campaign prior to the CCP’s centennial anniversary. From July to August, Hebei, Heilongjiang, Shandong, Jilin, Sichuan, Shanxi, and Liaoning were the provinces where the highest number of practitioners were targeted. Those arrested included teachers, restaurateurs, librarians, construction workers, factory workers, academics, nurses, engineers, farmers, shop owners, and many retirees.

On September 12, *Minghui* reported multiple examples of police harassment and arrests of practitioners of Falun Gong. On March 10, police in Fushun City, Liaoning Province, arrested Yang Xiaozhi for distributing Falun Gong materials. She reported that detention officers shocked her with electric batons before releasing her on bail on March 15. On May 14, police in Jilin City, Jilin Province, arrested 98-year-old Cai Xiufang for talking to people about Falun Gong. They held her in a metal cage at the police station for several hours and ransacked her home before releasing her on bail. Authorities arrested Gong Ruiping, a former elementary school teacher in Beijing, on July 20 in connection with practicing Falun Gong. Guards force fed her when she attempted a hunger strike. On July 23, authorities arrested Li Lihong, a middle school teacher in Ningxiang City, Hunan Province, for talking to people about Falun Gong. *Minghui* reported that Baimaqiao police station head Zhang Jie threatened to shoot and kill her. On August 15, a plainclothes police officer in Handan City, Hebei Province, beat Wang Shuqin for talking to him about Falun Gong. Wang suffered two broken ribs and was taken to the hospital.

ChinaAid reported that in January in Hengyang City, Hunan Province, officials detained Chen Wensheng for 25 days for preaching Christian teachings on the streets. Following his release from detention on January 29, local authorities came to his home to persuade him to stop “street evangelism.”

On June 14, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights published a statement from a group of 11 UN-affiliated independent human rights experts, including UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief Ahmed Shaheed, who were “alarmed by reports of alleged organ harvesting targeting minorities including Falun Gong practitioners, Uyghurs, Tibetans, Muslims, and Christians, in detention in China.” The independent experts reported receiving credible information from NGOs and activists stating that authorities “may have forcibly subjected... detainees from ethnic, linguistic, or religious minorities” to blood tests and organ examinations such as ultrasounds and x-rays without their informed consent, while other prisoners were not required to undergo such examinations. The results of the examinations were reportedly registered in a database of living organ sources that facilitated organ allocation. The independent experts stated, “According to the allegations received, the most common organs removed from the prisoners are reportedly hearts, kidneys, livers, corneas and, less commonly, parts of livers. This form of trafficking with a medical nature allegedly involves health sector professionals, including surgeons, anaesthetists and other medical specialists.” The experts said that despite the gradual development of a voluntary organ donation system, “[I]nformation continues to emerge regarding serious human rights violations in the procurement of organs for transplants in China,” and concern remained at the lack of independent oversight as to whether consent to donation and organ allocation was effectively given by prisoners or detainees. The experts noted that authorities reportedly prevented families of deceased detainees and prisoners from claiming their bodies.

On August 9, the government responded to the High Commissioner, asserting the experts’ report was “based on false information and makes groundless accusations against China” and was “filled with malice and prejudice.” The government said witnesses were “‘actors’ who repeatedly engage in slander and rumour-mongering on the issue of human rights in China[.]” The government stated that regulations required medical examinations for persons entering detention facilities “for the purpose of determining the detainee’s physical condition at the time of admittance to the facility and providing prompt treatment in the event of illness.” It stated that, by law, organ donation was “voluntary and nonremunerative” and that organ trading and involuntary organ harvesting had been criminalized.

In July, *Minghui* reported authorities collected DNA, blood samples, and other biometrics from Falun Gong practitioners against their will. During the first half of the year, this reportedly occurred in 18 provinces and municipalities – Beijing, Shanghai, Shandong, Heilongjiang, Jilin, Zhejiang, Liaoning, Gansu, Jiangxi,

Jiangsu, Guizhou, Hebei, Hubei, Henan, Shanxi, Sichuan, Guangdong, and Shaanxi. Between April 26 and 29, four practitioners in Shanghai reported police broke into their homes and forcibly collected blood samples. Practitioners reported police also collected handwriting samples, fingerprints, height information, photographs, and phone numbers. According to *Minghui*, some practitioners suspected authorities were collecting these biometrics and blood samples to establish a DNA and organ matching database, as well as to enhance the surveillance of practitioners.

According to the CAG annual report, harassment of members included the collection of biological data, such as blood samples and hair.

The *Union of Catholic Asian News (UCA News)* reported local Catholic sources said authorities abducted Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin of Yongjia (Wenzhou) Diocese in Zhejiang Province on October 25 and held him incommunicado for two weeks before releasing him. Shao was ordained a bishop in 2011 with Vatican approval, but his appointment was not approved by the two state-sanctioned church bodies – the Bishops’ Conference of the Catholic Church in China (BCCCC) and the CCPA – and he was not among the Vatican-approved bishops recognized by the CCPA as a result of the 2018 Sino-Vatican provisional agreement. According to *UCA News*, this was the seventh time since 2016 that authorities detained Shao, and his prior arrests stemmed from his refusal to join the CCPA.

Media reported the status of Catholic Bishop Taddeo Ma Daqin, whom authorities placed under house arrest in Shanghai following his resignation from the CCPA in 2012, remained unchanged as of April.

RFA reported that on April 21, police in Chengdu City, Sichuan Province, raided the Early Rain Covenant Church (ERCC) during a study session and detained 19 Church members, including 12 children. At the local police station, officers questioned the children without their parents present, in contravention of the law regarding detention of minors. According to a Church member, police released 16 of the 19 persons after detaining them for 11 hours and continued to hold three individuals without giving a reason to their families.

International Christian Concern reported that on August 22, police in Chengdu City entered the home of an ERCC member during a Sunday worship service and arrested 28 individuals, including 10 children. During the arrests, police injured Pastor Dai Zhichao on his arm and confiscated his mobile phone. An ERCC member said police beat many individuals in detention and when the children

became unruly, officers threatened to hit them on their heads. Police held Dai and the homeowner, He Shan, in detention for 14 days and fined He RMB 1,000 (\$160) for holding an illegal religious gathering.

*Bitter Winter* reported that in May the Beijing Municipal Court sentenced Lin Xianzan, a member of the Shouters, to three years in prison for being active in a banned religious group.

There were reports that authorities continued to crack down on qigong movements that it classified as cults or equivalent to cults. *Bitter Winter* reported that on April 27, the Zhaoyuan City People's Court in Shandong Province sentenced Sun Xuhui to two years in prison after she confessed to leading a branch of Zhonggong, a qigong movement, and "brainwashing" followers. According to *Bitter Winter*, the Ministry of Public Security set up a special task force with anti-Zhonggong divisions in Beijing and Tianjin municipalities, and Yunnan, Hebei, Liaonin, and Shandong Provinces. In May, police in Luoyang, Henan Province, arrested several followers of the Buddhist master Tian Ruisheng (also known as Shijakai), and accused them of spreading the teachings of the banned movement Xiang Gong, originally known as Buddhist Qigong.

ChinaAid reported that on March 7, authorities in Chengdu City, Sichuan Province, raided the Fountain of Life house church during a Sunday service and took Pastor Zha Changping, his wife, and three other church members to the local police station for questioning. Authorities released them after several hours.

According to *Bitter Winter*, authorities arrested 181 Association of Disciples members in a large operation carried out in late 2020 and early 2021 in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. They charged the members with being active in a cult. Authorities told local media the arrests were the result of the program implemented in 2018 to grant rewards up to RMB 50,000 (\$7,800) to those who denounced their neighbors or acquaintances as cult members; the program included a tip line for doing so.

On May 5, RFA reported that authorities arrested two elders of Zion Church in Beijing, as well as elder Zhang Chunlei of the Renai Reformed Church in Guiyang City, Guizhou Province, on suspicion of fraud. Zhang's defense attorney said the fraud accusations were related to his receiving his living allowance from member donations and said, "This [practice] happens in all religions, and it doesn't constitute fraud."

*Bitter Winter* reported that authorities arrested 10 teachers at a Christian school in Wuhu City, Anhui Province, on May 27. Authorities claimed the school was an illegal operation because it was not affiliated with the TSPM. According to *Bitter Winter*, local Christians viewed the raid as part of a larger crackdown on all forms of education not directly controlled by the CCP.

On May 27, a ChinaAid source reported the arrests and imprisonment of numerous Christians affiliated with the Local Assembly, a house church, in Wuxi City, Jiangsu Province, Nanning City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, and Beijing, accusing them of “using a cult to undermine the enforcement of law.”

ChinaAid reported that on November 16, the Xi’an Municipal Intermediate Court in Shaanxi Province upheld a lower court’s sentencing of Chang Yuchun and Li Chenhui to seven years’ imprisonment and a RMB 250,000 (\$39,200) fine for an “illegal business operation.” Chang and Li printed and sold Christian books from 2015 to 2020, when local police shut down their business, confiscated more than 210,000 books, and forcibly disappeared them into “residential surveillance at a designated location.”

On August 7, RFA reported that police in Taiyuan City, Shanxi Province, detained nine Golden Lamppost Church leaders and members who refused to join the TSPM, including Pastor Wang Xiaoguang and preacher Yang Rongli. According to sources, the group was carrying out a house church baptism when police arrested them. Shortly afterwards, local authorities used dynamite to demolish a Golden Lamppost church in Taiyuan City. On September 27, police arrested seven Church members. On December 27, authorities charged them with fraud. RFA said the detentions and demolition came amid a series of raids on unofficial Protestant house churches in Linfen County, Shanxi Province.

*Bitter Winter* reported on that on August 14, a court in Kaili City, Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, Guizhou Province, convicted four Seventh-day Adventist Church clergy of fraud for collecting offerings outside of the purview of the TSPM. The court sentenced one member to 12 years in prison, and the others to three to six years.

In November, *Minghui* reported that on October 14, nine officials came to Yi Shuying’s home and ordered her to sign a letter renouncing Falun Gong. They threatened officials would deny her granddaughter, a junior high school student, admission to college in the future if Yi did not renounce Falun Gong. Yi refused to comply.

In June, ChinaAid reported that ERCC Pastor Wang Yi, whom authorities sentenced to nine years in prison in December 2019, was “being treated very badly in prison,” held in solitary confinement in Chengdu Province’s Jintang Prison under constant supervision, and malnourished. ChinaAid stated prison officials continued to prevent family members and lawyers from visiting him and withheld medical treatment. According to the NGO International Christian Concern, since his arrest, Wang’s wife and child were living in an unknown location, under surveillance.

On April 20, RFA reported the police department of Yulin City, Shaanxi Province, confirmed to his wife that it was still detaining Gao Zhisheng, a human rights lawyer taken into custody in September 2017. Previously, Gao’s family had not known his whereabouts or whether he was alive. Gao had previously defended on-trial members of Christian groups, Falun Gong practitioners, and other minority groups.

On July 20, ChinaAid reported that the Xiamen City religious affairs bureau fined Pastor Yang Xibo of Xingguang Church, an unregistered church in Xiamen City, Fujian Province, and his wife RMB 200,000 (\$31,400) for organizing an “illegal religious activity.” According to RFA, several dozen state security police and officials from the local religious affairs bureau raided worship services at the church in April and May 2020. Yang told RFA the congregation was targeted for refusing to join the state-sanctioned TSPM.

During the year, authorities continued to detain Hui Muslim poet Cui Haoxin, known by his pen name An Ran, for Twitter posts in which he criticized the government for the imprisonment, surveillance, and persecution of Muslims in Xinjiang and throughout the country. Authorities took Cui into custody in January 2020 and accused him of “picking quarrels and stirring up trouble.”

On April 9, *Bitter Winter* published an article in which it described several CAG members being forced to perform labor during their imprisonment. One CAG member said she had to produce 250 artificial flowers per day, and if she failed to reach her quota, authorities forced her to stand four to six hours per night. The article stated that the plastic used in the artificial flowers contained chemicals and heavy metal elements harmful to the human body, such as vinyl chloride, formaldehyde, and lead, leading to endocrine disorders, decreased immunity, aplastic anemia, leukemia, and other blood diseases. The report also stated that exposure to the chemicals disrupted women’s menstrual cycles. Another female

CAG member who was sentenced to three years in a women's prison described working on 550 dresses per day in a dressmaking shop while standing for 13 hours. After her release, she was diagnosed with a herniated disc, which caused her pain if she sat for more than 10 minutes.

*AsiaNews* reported that the new SARA regulations entitled “Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy,” which took effect on May 1, placed additional ideological controls over the training, selection, and monitoring of clergy, including emphasizing allegiance to the CCP and socialism. The new regulations also stipulated the government would hold religious organizations and institutions responsible for the behavior of clergy and created a new centralized database to record information about clergy, as well as to track their behavior and “misdeeds.” Local governments were instructed to update the database with information on “rewards and punishments” of clergy. On February 11, *Bitter Winter* published an English-language translation and analysis of the new regulations. According to *Bitter Winter*, registration in the government database was “complicated.” Individuals who were not listed in it but claimed to be clergy would be committing a crime. Individuals unable to obtain a “clergy card” would include anyone not belonging to one of the five officially recognized patriotic religious associations, such as pastors of Protestant house churches, Catholics who rejected the government’s 2018 provisional agreement with the Holy See and refused to join the CCPA, teachers and clergy at independent mosques and Buddhist and Taoist temples, rabbis, and religious personnel of new religious movements. According to *AsiaNews*, “living buddhas,” under the regulations, “will not be able to exercise any ministry, nor will they be considered true reincarnations without the permission of the [CCP].” According to *Bitter Winter*, individuals had to prove they “support[ed] the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and support[ed] the socialist system.” *Bitter Winter* stated the regulations created “an Orwellian system of surveillance, and strengthen[ed] the already strict control on all clergy.”

The SARA continued to maintain publicly available statistics on some, but not all, registered religious groups. According to the SARA, there were 42,439 Buddhist temples and 8,349 Taoist temples registered in the country as of year's end. The SARA did not publish the number of registered Islamic mosques, Catholic churches, and Protestant churches. According to 2014 SARA statistics (the latest available), more than 5.7 million Catholics worshipped in sites registered to the CCPA. The SCIO's April 2018 white paper stated approximately 144,000 places of worship were registered to conduct religious activities in the country, among which were 33,500 Buddhist temples (including 28,000 Han Buddhist temples, 3,800 Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, and 1,700 Theravada Buddhist temples),

9,000 Taoist temples, 35,000 mosques, 6,000 CCPA churches and places of assembly spread across 98 dioceses, and 60,000 TSPM churches and places of assembly. The SCIO white paper also estimated there were more than 384,000 religious personnel in the country: 222,000 Buddhist, 40,000 Taoist, 57,000 Islamic, 57,000 Protestant, and 8,000 Catholic.

The government continued to close down or hinder the activities of religious groups not affiliated with the state-sanctioned religious associations, including unregistered Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, and other groups. At times, authorities said they shuttered a group because the group or its activities were unregistered; at other times, because the place of worship lacked necessary permits. Some local governments continued to restrict the growth of unregistered Protestant church networks and cross-congregational affiliations. Authorities allowed some unregistered groups to operate but did not recognize them legally. In some cases, authorities required unregistered religious groups to disband, leaving congregants from these groups with the sole option of attending services under a state-sanctioned religious leader.

International media and NGOs reported the government continued to carry out its nationwide campaign to “Sinicize religion” by altering doctrines and practices across all faith traditions to conform to and bolster CCP ideology and emphasize loyalty to the CCP and the state. The CCP’s Administrative Measures for Religious Groups, promulgated in 2020, further formalized the administrative procedures for Sinicizing all religions. Commenting on the administrative measures, one Catholic Priest told *AsiaNews*, “In practice, your religion no longer matters, if you are Buddhist, or Taoist, or Muslim or Christian; the only religion allowed is faith in the Chinese Communist Party.”

The five-year plan to promote the Sinicization of Christianity, issued in 2018, called for “incorporating Chinese elements into church worship services, hymns and songs, clerical attire, and the architectural style of church buildings,” and it proposed to “retranslate the Bible or rewrite biblical commentaries.” On its website in 2018, the TSPM pledged to “cultivate and practice core socialist values,” “carry out patriotic education,” and incorporate Sinicization into Christian theology, TSPM rules and regulations, theological education, and believers’ faith practice via symposiums, seminars, essay contests, and commemorative activities such as art exhibitions. During the year, the TSPM celebrated the 100th anniversary of the founding of the CCP and sponsored activities to “cultivate a Christian charity culture with Chinese characteristics.” The TSPM website stated that in 2022, it planned to examine experiences of Sinicization in various regions,

determine best practices from the 2018-2022 five-year plan, and formulate a 2023-2027 work plan for further promoting the Sinicization of Christianity.

On March 31, the *Economist* reported that the government targeted all religions for Sinicization and instructed Christian preachers to promote “core socialist values.” The *Economist* stated that government policy dictated “[i]nterpretations of the Bible should become more Sinified – meaning, presumably, that they should help to bolster belief in socialism.” Authorities required state-approved churches to display national flags and portraits of President Xi, a move some TSPM pastors resisted, and encouraged them “to use Chinese architecture and Chinese tunes for hymns, as well as Chinese-style painting, calligraphy and other ‘popular cultural forms.’” According to the *Economist*, despite increased pressure on house churches, authorities faced difficulties imposing Sinification on these unofficial, unregulated religious communities.

*UCA News* reported that according to the state-controlled BCCCC and the CCPA, on September 24, Catholics from two churches in Zibo City, Shandong Province, attended an event organized by the BCCCC called “One Hundred Sermons” that sought to explain President Xi’s instructions on religious activities and the promotion of Sinicization in the Catholic Church and how to adapt Catholicism to the socialist society. On September 27-29, 18 key members of the CCPA from various provinces and cities met in Xibaipo village, Hebei Province, for an educational program based on the theme, “Take the Red Footprints and Inherit the Red Spirit,” intended to cultivate positive feelings toward the CCP, patriotism, and socialism.

According to *Bitter Winter*, in some parts of the country, local authorities regularly reviewed sermons of TSPM pastors to ensure they were consistent with CCP ideology and contained praise for government leaders. *Bitter Winter* reported that on October 26, authorities in Shangqiu City, Henan Province, held a “Sinicization Seminar and Exchange Conference” for TSPM pastors and teachers. During the conference, participants raised the national flag and sang patriotic songs. Authorities told participants Christian social teaching should be Sinicized and that they would establish a “Research Office of Sinicization of Christianity” in Shangqiu. They said sermons should be preached on socialist themes.

*Bitter Winter* reported that at the national conference of the TSPM and the China Christian Council on July 8, state-appointed heads of the TSPM and the council ordered pastors to study and preach about President Xi’s July 1 speech on the 100th anniversary of the CCP’s founding. During the conference, religious

authorities told pastors to make President Xi's speech a principal topic of sermons and Bible study groups. TSPM chairman Xu Xiaohong offered pastors a model sermon based on nine points in the speech that glorified the nation, the CCP, and President Xi. He said pastors should instruct Christians to say, "Long live the great, glorious, and correct Chinese Communist Party. Long live the great, glorious, and heroic Chinese people." Wu Wei, chairman of the China Christian Council, said pastors should direct Christians in "thanking God for putting us in this great era" and "continuing to learn the spirit of General Secretary Xi's speech."

*Bitter Winter* reported that on October 29 in Tianjin Municipality, Huasheng Temple authorities required Buddhist monks to watch a film entitled, "The Battle at Lake Changjin." On its WeChat account, the temple stated the activity was "to carry out in-depth education on Party history and promote the spirit of patriotism." The film depicted the "story of Chinese soldiers defeating American troops, despite great odds" at the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir during the Korean War. One monk told *Bitter Winter*, "Party classes are supposed to be an activity that only Communist Party members need to attend. Compelling monks to take a Party movie class is something incestuous, making the temple look like a branch of the Communist Party."

According to the UFWD, from May 20-24, the Nanhai Buddhist Academy held a training session for more than 50 Buddhist deacons in Hainan Province. The training, themed "Love the Party, Love the Country, Love Socialism," included studying President Xi's speeches and PRC religious laws and regulations and viewing patriotic documentary films. Deputy minister of the provincial UFWD Liu Geng praised the Party, urged attendees to learn its history, promoted the Sinicization of religion, and advocated for socialist values in religious settings. He urged the deacons to be "politically reliable, religiously accomplished, and morally convincing."

According to the religious affairs bureau of Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province, on August 11, the Guangdong Taoist Association hosted an interfaith conference on the theme "Love the Party, the Country, and Socialism" to study Xi Jinping's speech commemorating the 100th anniversary of the CCP's founding, and to view "patriotic" films and exhibits. The chairmen, vice chairmen, and secretaries general of the Guangdong Buddhist Association, Islamic Association, Catholic Association, and Christian Association attended. Participants vowed to promote Sinicization in their respective religious teachings.

According to the Haixia Buddhist Network website, on February 26, monks and employees of Guangdong Buddhist Association and Guangxiao Temple in Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province, celebrated the 100th anniversary of the founding of the CCP by watching a video lecture on CCP history presented by the Central Party School. According to the network's website, monks in attendance said the CCP's history was "a history of seeking happiness for the people" and that "the Chinese people have become prosperous and strong under the leadership of the CCP." Master Mingsheng, president of the Guangdong Buddhist Association, called on Buddhists to adhere to the Sinicization of Buddhism and to "guide Buddhism to be compatible with Socialism."

According to a TSPM news outlet, the Guangdong Provincial Two Christian Councils held a ceremony at the Guangdong Union Theological Seminary on March 5 to launch a series of programs celebrating the CCP's 100th anniversary. Pastoral personnel and approximately 200 teachers and students participated. The programs included lectures on Party history and a knowledge contest on the themes of "knowing the Party's history, feeling the Party's favor, listening to the Party, and following the Party." There was also a seminar on the Sinicization of Christianity. Pastor Fan Hongen told participants the Guangdong Provincial Two Christian Councils was actively adapting to socialist society and strengthening the mission of Sinicizing Christianity.

According to ChinaAid, on June 25, the TSPM-affiliated Shandong Theological Seminary in Shandong Province held a theatrical performance with the theme of "Sing a Praise to the Party" to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the CCP's founding.

According to the UFWD of Guangdong Province, from March 22 to 28, the Guangdong Islamic Association organized imam training classes at the Guangdong Provincial Institute of Socialism. Thirty-six imams from nine cities in the province attended the one-week training session, at which they studied the history of the CCP, socialism, and how to "adhere to the direction of the Sinicization of Guangdong Islam." Imams attending the training said they would "unswervingly" listen to the Party.

According to the CCPA website, the Guangdong Catholic Association celebrated the 100th anniversary of the CCP by organizing a CCP training session in Guangxi Province from April 12 to 16 for 40 priests from 21 different cities. The participants toured several CCP "red education" sites, learned the "heroic deeds of revolutionary martyrs," and were encouraged to "love the party."

In May, the Minnan Buddhist Institute, located in Nanputuo Buddhist Temple, Xiamen City, Fujian Province, held a public speaking contest on the theme of “studying the history of the Party, thanking the Party, and following the Party.” Approximately 700 faculty members and students attended the contest to praise the Party’s “brilliant history and great accomplishments,” according to the Nanputuo Buddhist Temple’s website. RFA reported that a Shandong monk criticized the contest, saying that the Buddhist Institute coerced monks into participating. He stated that the institute would prohibit students who did not participate from studying there.

Media reported that throughout the year, crackdowns on some churches with foreign ties intensified significantly throughout the country. Many religious groups, including groups connected to the five “patriotic religious associations,” faced comprehensive investigations that included checking their background, organizational setting, membership, online evangelism, and finances. On April 3, International Christian Concern reported that the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) planned to intensify efforts to shut down social organizations, private nonenterprise units, and foundations that were not registered with relevant authorities. Organizations that had their registration revoked but nevertheless continued with their activities would also be targeted, the ministry said. According to RFA, “The MCA’s latest campaign has already begun in some provinces, such as Sichuan. The Department of Civil Affairs in Sichuan published a list of 84 ‘Illegal Social Organizations’ on March 25 which contain[ed] several Buddhist and Christian groups, including the heavily persecuted house church Early Rain Covenant Church.”

ChinaAid reported that authorities continued to harass members of the Trinity Gospel Harvest Church in Shenzhen City, Guangdong Province, during the year. On March 1, security officials warned members against gathering to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Church’s founding. On April 25, police and religious affairs officers raided Church services and detained pastors Mao Zhibin and Cao Yuan and eight members for questioning, without explanation. On July 11, authorities again raided Sunday worship services. The government formally banned the Church at the end of April. According to ChinaAid, in May, authorities closed a beach where baptisms of new members were to take place in order to prevent the baptisms, causing the group to move to another beach. In September, under instructions from the local police, a Shenzhen hotel refused service to Church members and refunded fees they paid to stay there.

*Bitter Winter* reported authorities cracked down on religious groups that organized prayer meetings in hotel rooms. On March 16 in Guiyang City, Guizhou Province, the Renai Reformed Church organized a prayer meeting in the Wenzhou Hotel complex. Police raided the room and arrested several congregants. When Church elder Zhang Chunlei went to the station to negotiate the release of the Church members, police arrested him as well and held him in detention for 15 days. They raided the houses of followers and confiscated computers and religious materials. Reporting on the same March 16 raid, RFA said officials stated they detained the individuals because gatherings were restricted to family members due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In October, ChinaAid reported that the local government of Jiake village, Yunnan Province, the TSPM, and the Chinese Christian Council banned Kai Yiduo from taking part in religious activities in what ChinaAid said was retribution for his dispute with the local government. Yiduo said the government had not compensated him after demolishing his home.

In November, the *Jerusalem Post* reported that authorities again did not permit Jews in Kaifeng City, Henan Province, to celebrate Hanukkah. Sources reported that on November 28, the Jewish community in Shanghai was able to hold a Hannukah commemoration.

In September, *Bitter Winter* reported the China Christian Council instructed all churches and congregations to “organize worship activities” to commemorate the 76th anniversary of China’s victory over Japan in World War II and to “further promote the fine tradition of patriotism and love of religion and to demonstrate the good image of peace-loving Christianity in China.” The directive stated, “Churches are requested to submit evidence of the relevant activities (text, video and photo materials) to the Media Ministry Department of the China Christian Council by September 10.” A photograph accompanying the *Bitter Winter* article showed students at Fujian Theological Seminary in Fujian Province praying for Red Army “martyrs.”

Throughout the year, the government closed venues throughout the country, including religious venues, and prohibited mass gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Media reported authorities tried to stop many religious groups from congregating or holding services online during the COVID-19 lockdown. According to media, in some localities, government officials used COVID-19 precautions as a pretext to prevent religious organizations from recommencing their activities long after restrictions had been lifted in analogous nonreligious

contexts. According to the *National Catholic Reporter*, authorities prevented Catholics from celebrating the Feast of Mary on May 24 at the Sheshan Shrine in Shanghai, the country's most famous Marian shrine and traditionally a pilgrimage site. Authorities cited the COVID-19 pandemic, but critics noted the government permitted amusement parks and a golf club in the area to remain open during the same period. There was at least one case, however, where authorities relaxed restrictions: when monks at the Shenyang Ci'en Buddhist Temple in Shenyang City, Liaoning Province, declared, "Monks and believers love the Party and will continue to follow the party to accomplish Sinicization," government officials authorized them to resume large-scale services.

One source said the government used COVID-19 prevention as a pretext to close Islamic venues, particularly in Qinghai and Gansu Provinces and Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, where Hui Muslims are concentrated, while allowing Buddhist temples to remain open.

RFA reported that on April 30, officials in Yunnan Province shut down the Bulai Protestant Church in Lao Mudan village, Fugong County, ostensibly to prevent the spread of COVID-19, despite the church's having been allowed to meet previously throughout the pandemic. *China Christian Daily* reported that on August 1, an unregistered church in Suzhou City, Jiangsu Province, was forced to interrupt its on-site Sunday service when local officials, citing "reducing crowds for epidemic prevention and control," cut off the electricity and pasted seals on the doors. Authorities also suspended services at other local churches in Suzhou, *China Christian Daily* reported.

According to the *Economist*, many house churches held services online and there were numerous Bible study groups and church forums on WeChat. Some unauthorized seminaries and missionary training schools moved online. One pastor said some online congregations were 50 percent larger than in-person meetings. However, in March, Open Doors USA reported officials monitored online activities and "even officially registered churches were ordered to stop online services."

In December, *Bitter Winter* reported that authorities, citing the COVID-19 pandemic, took measures to stop Christians from gathering for Christmas celebrations, although they allowed some musical and cultural events to take place in what *Bitter Winter* described as "cosmetic" activities designed to give the appearance of religious tolerance. *Bitter Winter* reported that authorities in Rong'an County, Liuzhou City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region ordered

elementary and kindergarten teachers and students not to celebrate Christmas at school or at home, calling the holiday a “Western celebration.” The directive included the name and contact number for a tip line for people to report individuals “doing any event” for Christmas.

Media and human rights organizations reported SARA regulations stating that only the Islamic Association of China was permitted to organize Muslim pilgrimage trips, issued in 2020, remained in effect. The regulations stated that those who applied to join the Hajj must be “patriotic, law-abiding, and have good conduct,” must have never before participated in the Hajj, and be in sound physical and mental health. They also had to be able to pay all costs associated with Hajj travel and to oppose religious extremism. According to a notice issued by the Islamic Association of China on June 15, citing the risk of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government suspended all Hajj activities during the year.

The government continued to label several religious groups, including the CAG, Shouters, Association of Disciples, All-Sphere Church, and many others, as cults or xie jiao organizations. The government also continued to ban groups, such as Falun Gong, that it classified as illegal organizations.

*Bitter Winter* reported that on July 26, the Supreme People’s Court published its “Opinion on Providing Judicial Services and Protection for Accelerating the Modernization of Agriculture and Rural Areas.” The “opinion” included provisions to “intensify the punishment of illegal religious activities and overseas infiltration activities” in rural areas, “crack down on organizing and using xie jiao organizations to commit crimes,” and “stop the use of religion and xie jiao from interfering in rural public affairs.”

*Bitter Winter* reported that on October 23, approximately 100 children from preschools of the district of Jiaocheng in Ningde City, Fujian Province, underwent a program of “preventive education.” The children, ages three to six, received picture booklets, viewed a panel exhibition, and watched cartoons warning against “xie jiao and illegal religion.” One film presented the CAG as a cult, and others admonished against “superstition” and “illegal religion” in general.

*Bitter Winter* reported provincial governments shut down local branches of the Good News Mission, a Protestant religious group with ties to South Korea. On March 30, the Civil Affairs Bureau of Shaoxing City, Zhejiang Province, banned the group and raided local communities. On April 30, the government in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, Jilin Province, announced prefecture authorities

had banned the Good News Mission and shut down its churches. According to *Bitter Winter*, the Good News Mission was “not in the list of xie jiao, but it is now a common strategy to ban a religious movement in one region and province after the other, leading to a de facto national ban.”

*Bitter Winter* reported authorities continued to link xie jiao to criminal activities and other social ills. In November, border police and “legal education” officers carried out a surveillance and propaganda operation in Ningming County, Guangxi Province, and Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province, both on the border with Vietnam, prompted by what *Bitter Winter* said were fears that illegal religious groups might enter the country via Vietnam. The campaign against drug smuggling and HIV/AIDS included indoctrinating residents against “illegal religion” and xie jiao. It targeted 600,000 Hani, who hold predominantly shamanistic beliefs, and 900,000 Yi, who practice both Christianity and shamanistic religions.

*Bitter Winter* reported that on National Security Education Day on April 15, authorities mounted exhibitions as part of an anti-xie jiao campaign, and students across the country signed pledges to renounce illegal religious activities by groups labeled cults. Zhou Qiang, president of the Supreme People’s Court, called cults “a cancer” and stated the CCP had three main targets: Falun Gong, CAG, and the Association of Disciples. He also said cults colluded with Western anti-China forces, and he accused the Association of Disciples of manipulating some local elections. The article included a photograph from the social media site Weibo showing students from Chongqing University of Posts and Telecommunications in Chongqing Province signing a large billboard pledging to renounce xie jiao.

State-run media reported that on September 10, Qionghshan District in Haikou City, Hainan Province, organized a series of anti-illicit drugs and anticult propaganda activities in middle schools. Government officials distributed brochures, hung propaganda banners, and gave lectures to teachers and students on how to recognize a cult and “consciously resist it.”

Media reported that in June in Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province, volunteers conducted large-scale COVID-19 testing at multiple locations, where they distributed educational literature warning against xie jiao alongside personal protective equipment and hand sanitizer. The volunteers reportedly posted signs publicizing an “anti-xie jiao” app, and digital billboards warned residents about the harmful influence of xie jiao and advised them to “be wary of cult organizations taking advantage of the epidemic to spread rumors and create chaos.”

According to *Bitter Winter*, in October, prefecture-level city authorities in Hui'an County and nearby Quanzhou City, Fujian Province, launched an anti-xie jiao program as part of their celebration of the CCP's centennial anniversary. Teachers organized lessons in all elementary and middle schools and distributed propaganda material against xie jiao and "illegal religion." Individuals played a WeChat game in which they proved they had read the propaganda material by answering questions. Those who answered the most questions correctly won prizes. According to *Bitter Winter*, the names of those who scored low were sent to the local CCP secretaries. Local CCP officials said the initiative was needed because during the COVID-19 pandemic, "illegal religion" and xie jiao had increased in Fujian.

According to media, authorities maintained a near ubiquitous surveillance system through the development and widespread deployment of advanced technology such as artificial intelligence, CCTVs, and social media applications. In October, an academic who studies the subject told the *Diplomat* that domestic police departments in ethnic minority areas in Ningxia, Sichuan, and Yunnan Provinces and elsewhere purchased digital forensics tools to scan mobile phone hard drives for "more than 50,000 markers or patterns of illegal activity." More than 500 cities and municipalities across the country developed "smart city systems" that used forms of biometric surveillance that could surveil ethnic and religious minorities.

According to ChinaAid, on March 19, the Siming District Religious Affairs Bureau in Xiamen City, Fujian Province, released a circular that instructed police officers to patrol office buildings and hotels in the district on Saturday evenings and Sundays to prevent a resurgence of house church gatherings that were suppressed in past months and years. The circular identified several buildings and streets for priority patrol.

CBN News reported in August that the government encouraged citizens to report anyone distributing printed religious material or holding worship gatherings. Authorities offered informants RMB 1,000 (\$160). One Hui Muslim source said officials instructed children to report on their parents' and family's religious and cultural practices. ChinaAid reported that in early January, authorities in Shijiazhuang, Baoding, Xingtai, and other areas in Hebei Province encouraged the public to report house churches. Authorities in Xingtai issued a "Notice on Rewards for Reporting Religious Activities during the Epidemic," promising whistleblowers a reward of more than RMB 500 (\$78). In early August, authorities in Meilisi Daur District, Qiqihar City, Heilongjiang Province,

announced a “Reward System for Reporting Illegal Religious Activities and Crimes,” under which individuals could make reports by phone, email, or letter, and receive RMB 1,000 (\$160). According to ChinaAid, reportable violations included “unqualified religious personnel, unauthorized cross-regional activities, preaching and distribution of printed religious works, audiovisual products outside of worship venues, unauthorized donations, and private family gatherings.”

In January, the Christian rights advocacy NGO World Watch Monitor reported authorities in Henan and Jiangxi Provinces placed surveillance cameras in all state-approved religious venues. Many of the cameras were reportedly installed next to standard CCTV cameras but were linked to the Public Security Bureau, meaning artificial intelligence could instantly connect with other government databases.

The *New York Times* reported in February that authorities in Sanya City, Hainan Province, continued to take measures against the 10,000-member, predominantly Muslim Utsul ethnic minority, including efforts to ban girls from wearing traditional dress, including hijabs and long skirts, in school. Signs on shops and homes that read “Allahu akbar” (God is greatest) in Arabic were covered with foot-wide stickers with the words “China Dream,” a nationalistic official slogan. Restaurants removed the Chinese characters for halal from signs and menus. Authorities closed two Islamic schools. Local mosque leaders said authorities told them to remove loudspeakers that broadcast the call to prayer from the tops of minarets, place them on the ground, and turn down the volume. Authorities halted construction of a new mosque because of its supposedly “Arab” architectural elements. According to residents, the city barred children younger than 18 from studying Arabic. The restrictions followed a 2019 government-issued “Working Document Regarding the Strengthening of Overall Governance over Huixin and Huihui,” which referred to the only two predominantly Utsul neighborhoods in the island province. One academic, commenting on the measures, told the *New York Times*, “This is about trying to strengthen state control. It’s purely anti-Islam.”

According to a *National Review* article published in July, the government continued to require churches to display banners with CCP slogans, perform the national anthem before singing Christian hymns, and “demonstrate their loyalty to the CCP above all, and only secondarily to the church.” According to the *National Review*, “Consistent indoctrination and blatant submission to communist standards [was] spreading across all religious groups.”

According to Open Doors USA, in Shanxi, Henan, and Jiangxi Provinces, authorities threatened Christians with the removal of social welfare benefits and

pensions if they refused to replace Christian imagery, such as crosses, with pictures of Xi Jinping. One Christian on welfare assistance reported officials told him that since he believed in God, he should ask God for food instead of living off the CCP.

In April, *UCA News* reported that authorities in Zhaoxian City, Hebei Province, closed the House of the Dawn orphanage operated by Catholic nuns from the Sisters of the Child Jesus congregation, accusing the nuns of “illegal adoption practices.” Local sources stated authorities actually closed the orphanage as part of a crackdown on church facilities operated by the unregistered Catholic Church. The orphanage served more than 100 children, many with special needs. According to *UCA News*, authorities accused Christian-run organizations of proselytizing and converting children through their social and charitable work.

According to ChinaAid, on September 4 in Harbin City, Heilongjiang Province, more than 30 CCP officials, including SWAT officers, police, religious affairs bureau officials, and local school district administrators, raided the Maizi Christian Music High School and arrested all staff members and several students. They seized school assets, including pianos, computers, and documents. Prior to the raid, police took the school’s principal into custody. The students were released after 24 hours, but authorities held staff for questioning for several days. According to *AsiaNews*, there were reports authorities would charge the school principal with proselytizing.

Authorities continued to restrict the printing and distribution of the Bible, the Quran, and other religious texts. The government continued to allow some foreign educational institutions to provide religious materials in Chinese, which were used by both registered and unregistered religious groups. During the year, however, many provinces conducted campaigns cracking down on “illegal religious publications” emanating from unofficial distribution channels.

ChinaAid reported in July that the Bao’an District Court in Shenzhen City, Guangdong Province, found four Christian employees of the Shenzhen Life Tree Technology Development Company guilty of “illegal business” and gave them sentences ranging from fifteen months to up to six years in prison, with fines of up to RMB 200,000 (\$31,400). Authorities arrested the individuals in 2020 for illegally selling audio Bible players and confiscated their electronics and other belongings.

Local authorities throughout the country continued to ban the sale and display of religious couplets (banners with poetry) traditionally displayed during Lunar New

Year. Local authorities threatened to fine or imprison anyone caught selling them. According to ChinaAid, officials in Pingdingshan, Henan Province, went house to house tearing couplets off the doors of Christian families that displayed faith-related messages.

In October, the BBC reported that Apple, at the request of the government, removed from its store the app Quran Majeed, which allows users to download the Quran. The media outlet stated, “The BBC understands that the app was removed for hosting illegal religious texts.” Apple declined to comment to the BBC.

Christian organizations seeking to use social media and smartphone apps to distribute Christian materials reported the government increased censorship of these materials. According to International Christian Concern, authorities removed Bible-related apps from app stores. Catholic News Agency reported in October that a digital Bible company removed its app from the Apple app store after Apple stated the company must demonstrate it had authorization from the government to distribute an app with book or magazine content in mainland China.

In May, International Christian Concern reported that according to a tweet by Father Francis Liu from the Chinese Christian Fellowship of Righteousness, the home pages of some Christian WeChat accounts, such as “Gospel League” and “Life Quarterly,” no longer showed any content. Instead, visitors saw a message reading, “[We] received a report that [this account] violates the ‘Internet User Public Account Information Services Management Provisions’ and its account has been blocked and suspended.”

*China Christian Daily* reported the government blocked many registered churches’ WeChat accounts during a crackdown on online Christian content. The banned accounts were managed by TSPM-approved churches in Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Guangdong, Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Yunnan Provinces. The Shanghai Pure Heart Church, Huai’an Church of Jiangsu Province, and Nanjing Holy Word Church of Jiangsu Province were among the churches whose official WeChat accounts that authorities blocked. “Today’s Nanjing Union Life,” the WeChat page of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, the only national Protestant seminary in the country, was inaccessible from May to the end of the year. *China Christian Daily* further reported that WeChat censored the words “Christ,” “gospel,” and “fellowship.” ChinaAid also reported that authorities blocked key words related to Christianity from search engines.

International Christian Concern stated Bibles in hard copy were not available for sale online and said TSPM-owned bookstores were increasingly selling books promoting Xi Jinping Thought and CCP ideology. According to International Christian Concern, “Even their WeChat accounts are turning into propaganda channels for CCP.”

ChinaAid reported that at the end of the year, a court upheld the initial verdict in the second trial of Chen Yu (also known as Zhang Xiaomai). Chen owned and operated the Xiaomai Bookstore in Linhai, Zhejiang Province, which sold Christian books online and in-store. In September 2019, the government arrested Chen for selling online “illegal religious overseas publications” and sentenced him to seven years in prison and a fine of RMB 200,000 (\$31,400). Authorities also confiscated 12,864 books and investigated more than 10,000 individuals who bought from Chen. Nationwide, authorities confiscated all copies Chen sold of ERCC Pastor Wang Yi’s *Transformation of the Gospel*.

ChinaAid reported that the Propaganda Department of the CCP Central Committee censored information related to Christianity in school textbooks. In one textbook containing a picture of Michelangelo’s “Creation of Adam” on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, authorities changed the word in the description from “God” to “Old Man,” and in the description of a painting of the Virgin Mary and Jesus, they changed “Holy Mother and Holy Son” to “mother and son.”

A Hui Muslim source told international media the government was attempting to remove characteristics of Hui religion and culture to make Hui citizens indistinguishable from Han citizens, with whom they share physical characteristics and language. Authorities took down minarets and domes and consolidated mosques. He said authorities trained clergy in Party doctrine and instructed them to pass those teachings on to their religious communities. The government targeted Hui cultural and business elites to remove Hui texts and art and cut off independent financial support to the community. The source called this a kind of “cultural genocide.”

On October 24, National Public Radio (NPR) reported that the government had removed domes and minarets from thousands of mosques across the country, saying these were evidence of “foreign religious influence,” and to replace them with more traditionally Chinese architectural features. Authorities removed the dome and minarets from the Dongguan Mosque in Xining City, Qinghai Province. According to one local resident, “The government says they want us to ‘Sinicize’ our mosques so that they look more like Beijing’s Tiananmen Square.” NPR

stated the campaign coincided with rising anti-Muslim sentiment in the country and growing religious restrictions.

According to ChinaAid, on February 1, authorities for the second time removed a 100-year-old cross from Shuixin Church in Wenzhou City, Zhejiang Province, against the wishes of the congregation. They first cut the building's electricity and then took the church's night watch staff into custody. According to one Christian observer, several security guards held one church member in a headlock and confiscated his mobile phone. They warned him, "Do not fight back. We are enforcing orders from higher officials." Authorities had removed the cross in June 2014, but the church later reinstalled it.

ChinaAid reported that on July 28, authorities in Zhoushan City, Zhejiang Province, forced several fishermen to remove crosses from their privately owned fishing vessels. Authorities also erased "Emmanuel" slogans painted on boats and threatened that if the fishermen refused to cooperate, authorities would not grant them fishing permits or allow them to purchase gasoline for their boats. The authorities did not present any legal documents supporting their actions. The fishermen wrote on social media, "The government is completely unreasonable. Fishing boats are our personal property. We have the right to put crosses on our boats. Religious freedom is written in the constitution. However, it is just empty talk. The government never enforces the constitution."

According to *Bitter Winter*, in January authorities sentenced Pastor Li Juncai of the Yuan Yang County House Church in Xinxiang City, Henan Province, to five and a half years in prison. In early 2019, Li had resisted government orders to remove the cross from his building and change the Church motto from "Love God and Love Others" to "Love the Country and Love Religion." He also objected to constructing a stand within the church where a national flag would be placed. Authorities arrested Li in February 2019, and the Yuan Yang County prosecutor's office charged him with "misappropriation of office, obstruction of official duties, and destruction of accounts." He remained in jail until his trial. The court found him guilty on all three counts.

According to the SARA data, at year's end, religious groups ran 87 schools in the country, including 37 Buddhist, 10 Taoist, 10 Islamic, nine Catholic, and 21 Protestant. Authorities barred students younger than 18 from receiving religious instruction, but enforcement and implementation of the prohibition varied widely across and within regions. According to the SARA, there were six national-level religious colleges. Although there were two CCPA seminaries in Beijing, civil

society sources said one of these institutions was primarily used as CCPA propaganda for international visitors.

In March, Open Doors USA reported authorities using CCTV observed a woman in Shandong Province taking her child to a state-affiliated church. Officials reprimanded her for violating the ban on children participating in religious activities, such as attending church.

In May, *Bitter Winter* reported that police came to the home of Zhao Weikai, a worker at Taiyuan Reformed Church in Taiyuan City, Shanxi Province, with an arrest warrant for “religious fraud.” Police arrested Zhao and confiscated his mobile phone and other items. They reportedly told Zhao to stop homeschooling minors, which is prohibited by law. Individuals present questioned the summons’ validity, saying that court officials had neither signed nor stamped it.

In November, ChinaAid reported that during the year, the government shut down several informal Christian schools. On May 27, authorities raided the Xuan De learning center, affiliated with the Wuhu Jiamishan Christian Church in Anhui Province. They confiscated books, computers, and mobile phones, and detained the school’s headmaster and teachers. On May 28, the Wuhu civil affairs bureau labeled the center an “illegal social organization,” and in July, the Wuhu local government deemed the Church an “illegal gathering.” On October 12, police arrested five educators from the Abeka Academy, a U.S.-based Christian homeschool education program in Zhenjiang City, Jiangsu Province, and detained children, parents, and teachers.

Individuals seeking to enroll at an official seminary or other institution of religious learning continued to be required to obtain the support of the corresponding state-sanctioned religious association. The government continued to require students to demonstrate “political reliability,” and political issues were included in examinations of graduates from religious schools. Both registered and unregistered religious groups reported a shortage of trained clergy, due in part to government controls on admission to seminaries.

National regulations required Muslim clerics to meet the following requirements: “Uphold the leadership of the CCP; love Islam and serve Muslims; possess a degree in or receive formal training in Islamic scriptural education; have graduated from junior high school or above, in addition to attaining competency in Arabic; and be at least 22 years old.” According to sources, imams had to pass an exam testing their ideological knowledge to renew their license each year.

The government and the Holy See remained without formal diplomatic relations, and the Holy See had no official representative to the country. Media stated the SARA's "Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy" made no provision for the Vatican to have a role in the selection of Catholic bishops, despite the 2018 Sino-Vatican provisional agreement reportedly involving both Chinese authorities and the Holy See in the process of appointing bishops. *AsiaNews* stated the regulations undermined the Sino-Vatican provisional agreement. The news outlet said, "Even Catholic bishops, although 'approved and ordained' by the Council of Chinese Bishops, can only exercise their ministry after registering with the SARA. In this way, the state and not the Church retains management of the pastoral ministry of bishops." According to *AsiaNews*, the provisions reenforced the distinction between official and unofficial priests and bishops, "thus endorsing and supporting the division imposed by the regime." Some senior Chinese sources, however, told the Catholic news outlet *The Pillar* that the new rules would not invalidate the agreement. One Catholic cleric said provisions on financial management were aimed not at Catholic churches but rather at Buddhist temples, while those pertaining to "foreign domination" were aimed primarily at underground Protestant house churches. He said the government had omitted the Vatican from the regulations because the CCP would not want to publicly identify a foreign power in any way, despite coordinating on the selection of bishops.

Media reported that on May 20, authorities detained seven priests and an unspecified number of seminarians in Xinxiang City, Henan Province, for using an abandoned factory as a seminary to train priests. On May 21, they arrested Vatican-approved Bishop Joseph Zhang Weizhu. All were accused of violating the SARA's May 1 regulation outlawing religious activities, including worship, in places not registered with the state. The CCPA does not recognize Xinxiang as a diocese, although it was created by the Vatican in 1936. Zhang was ordained by the Vatican as a bishop in 1991, but his appointment was not approved by the two state-sanctioned church bodies – the BCCCC and CCPA – and he was not among the Vatican-approved bishops recognized as a result of the Sino-Vatican provisional agreement.

Media reported in April that authorities in Cangnan County, Wenzhou City, Zhejiang Province, fined Catholic Huang Ruixun RMB 200,000 (\$31,400) for offering his private chapel to Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin and approximately 20 worshippers to conduct services. They charged that the event was an illegal religious activity. Shao was ordained by the Vatican as Bishop of

Yongjia/Wenzhou Diocese in 2016, but he was not among the Vatican-approved bishops recognized as a result of the Sino-Vatican provisional agreement.

On September 8, Franciscan Father Francis Cui Qingqi was ordained Bishop of Hankou/Wuhan Diocese, with the approval of the state and the Catholic Church, making him the sixth bishop ordained since the Sino-Vatican provisional agreement of 2018, and the fourth since it was extended in 2020. The Vatican press office director told journalists that Pope Francis appointed Cui on June 23, 2020. Media stated the state-sanctioned BCCCC had elected him “democratically” on September 27, 2020.

A number of Catholic clergy, including some bishops appointed by the Pope, remained unable or unwilling to register with the CCPA.

The *South China Morning Post* (SCMP) reported that during an August 27-28 conference on ethnic affairs attended by CCP leaders, legislators, and the political advisory body, including all seven Politburo Standing Committee members, President Xi told attendees to “continue to eradicate poisonous thoughts of ethnic separatism and religious extremism.” SCMP reported that Xi’s statements were an apparent attempt to “rebuff international allegations of human rights abuses.”

According to the State Council website, the government convened a national conference on religious affairs on December 3-4, the first since 2016, that called on clergy, the CCP, and government officials to ensure religious doctrine followed the CCP. At the conference, President Xi said religions in the country had made progress in “enhancing their recognition” of the Chinese nation and culture, along with the CCP and socialism. Xi emphasized the need to “uphold and develop a religious theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics, work in line with the Party’s basic policy on religious affairs, and uphold the principle that religions in China must be Chinese in orientation.” Xi urged “full and strict governance of religions.” He told CCP and government officials to train individuals who were “adept at the Marxist view on religion, familiar with religious affairs, and competent to engage in work related to religious believers.” According to media reports, Xi further emphasized strengthening “the management of online religious affairs,” which critics said implied that religious practitioners would be disciplined for inappropriate online commentary.

The Associated Press reported that on May 18, the host of a program on CGTN, the overseas channel of state broadcaster CCTV, used antisemitic tropes. Speaking in English, Zheng Junfeng said, “Some people believe that U.S. pro-Israeli policy

is traceable to the influence of wealthy Jews in the U.S. and the Jewish lobby on U.S. foreign policy makers... Jews dominate finance and internet sectors.” Responding on Twitter, the Israeli embassy in China stated, “We have hoped that the times of the ‘Jews controlling the world’ conspiracy theories were over, unfortunately antisemitism has shown its ugly face again. We are appalled to see blatant antisemitism expressed in an official Chinese media outlet.”

In a June SCIO white paper entitled, “The Communist Party of China and Human Rights Protection – A 100-Year Quest,” the government stated that it protects “normal religious activities” and “does not interfere in the internal affairs of religions.”

On August 13, the outlet *Algemeiner* described as antisemitic a caricature of the U.S. Secretary of State that the state-owned *Xinhua* news agency published alongside *Xinhua*’s article on the Secretary’s July meeting with World Health Organization head Tedros Ghebreyesus. The cartoon depicted the Secretary as a devil with red skin, horns, and a large, elongated nose, holding a report entitled “COVID-19 Origins Tracing.” The American Jewish Committee denounced the cartoon on Twitter, calling it “despicable.”

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

Because the government and individuals closely link religion, culture, and ethnicity, it was difficult to categorize many incidents of societal discrimination as being solely based on religious identity.

Despite labor law provisions against discrimination in hiring based on religious belief, some employers continued to discriminate against religious believers. Religious minorities continued to report employers terminated their employment due to their current or prior religious activities.

In 2020, the *Economist* reported employment discrimination against ethnic minorities was pervasive, citing a study that found that Hui job seekers had to send twice as many applications as Han applicants and that Uyghurs had on average to send nearly four times as many applications just to hear back from potential employers. The study found the gap was greater for highly educated workers, with Uyghur candidates who were in the top 1 percent academically having to send six times as many applications as their Han counterparts. According to the *Economist*, the application gap was “similar in both smaller cities and in the provincial-level regions of Guangdong, Beijing and Shanghai. State-owned enterprises, which

have an official mandate to hire more minority workers, appeared at least as biased as other firms.”

Discrimination against potential or current tenants based on their religious beliefs reportedly continued. Since 2017 and 2018, when articles in the 2005 Public Security Administration Punishment Law related to “suspicious activity” began to be enforced in earnest, Falun Gong practitioners reported ongoing difficulty in finding landlords who would rent them apartments. Sources stated government enforcement of this law continued to move the country further away from informal discriminatory practices by individual landlords towards a more formalized enforcement of codified discriminatory legislation.

In June, the *Diplomat* reported growing anti-Muslim sentiment in society as a result of the government’s Sinicization campaign, which the *Diplomat* said could lead to violence. Sources said government propaganda portraying Uyghurs as radicals, extremists, and terrorists had created societal hostility toward that group. Anti-Muslim speech in social media reportedly remained widespread.

There were reports that Uyghur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, and other religious minorities continued to face difficulties in finding accommodation when they traveled.

In January, media reported messages on social media blamed local Catholics from Shijiazhuang City and “several priests from Europe and the United States” for the spread of COVID-19 in Hebei Province that resulted in a lockdown on January 6. Local priests denounced the posts, saying there had been no religious activities, masses, or meetings since December 24, 2020.

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

The U.S. Secretary of State, Deputy Secretary of State, Charge d’Affaires, and other senior State Department officials and embassy and consulate general representatives repeatedly and publicly expressed concerns about abuses of religious freedom in the country, including in Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjiang. In July, the Secretary of State met virtually with Uyghur family members, Xinjiang internment camp survivors, and advocates to express the U.S. commitment to calling for the government to end atrocities in Xinjiang. In July, the Deputy Secretary of State met with State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi and raised concerns about human rights abuses in the country, including in Hong Kong and Tibet, and the ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity occurring in

Xinjiang. During the Secretary of State's October meeting with Foreign Minister Wang, the Secretary's spokesperson said the Secretary "raised concerns about a range of actions that undermine the international rules-based order and that run counter to our values and interests and those of our allies and partners, including actions related to human rights, Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, the East and South China Seas, and Taiwan."

Embassy and consulate officials regularly sought meetings with a range of government officials managing religious affairs to obtain more information on government policies and to advocate for greater religious freedom and tolerance. Embassy and consulate officials, including the Charge and Consuls General, urged government officials at the central, provincial, and local levels, including those at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other ministries, to implement stronger protections for religious freedom and to release prisoners of conscience. The Charge highlighted religious freedom in meetings with senior officials. The Department of State, embassy, and consulates general regularly called upon the government to release prisoners of conscience and advocated on behalf of individual cases of persons imprisoned for religious reasons.

PRC authorities consistently harassed and intimidated religious leaders to dissuade them from speaking with U.S. officials. Authorities regularly prevented members of religious communities from attending events at the embassy and consulates general, and security services questioned individuals who did attend. Authorities routinely declined to approve or postponed U.S. officials' requests to visit religious sites and meet with religious leaders.

The Charge, Consuls General in Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenyang, and Wuhan, and other embassy and consulate general officials met with religious groups, as well as academics, NGOs, members of registered and unregistered religious groups, and family members of religious prisoners to reinforce U.S. support for religious freedom. Embassy and consulate general officials hosted events around religious holidays and conducted roundtable discussions with religious leaders to convey the importance of religious pluralism in society and learn about issues facing religious communities.

The embassy continued to amplify Department of State religious freedom initiatives directly to local audiences through postings to the embassy website and to its Weibo, WeChat, and Twitter accounts. Over the course of the year, the embassy published nearly 50 messages promoting religious freedom, including videos, statements, images, and infographics. The embassy highlighted the

Secretary's participation in the civil society-led International Religious Freedom Summit in July and his visit to the Vatican in June to emphasize U.S. support for religious freedom. It posted or retweeted posts concerning the state of religious freedom in Xinjiang and Tibet. For example, on International Religious Freedom Day on October 27, the embassy reposted the Secretary's message supporting respect for religious freedom, as well as information describing the Chinese government's continuing control over religion and restrictions on the activities of religious adherents. On December 10, the embassy issued a Human Rights Day statement from the Charge on its website and through its international and Chinese social media accounts. The statement highlighted the breadth of gross violations of human rights occurring in the PRC, including restrictions on religious freedom. The embassy also shared greetings from the President and Secretary of State on special religious days for Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Tibetan Buddhists; these were viewed by millions of social media users. In total, embassy posts on social media garnered almost 10 million views and approximately 240,000 engagements.

On January 13, CBP issued a Withhold Release Order that prohibited the import of all cotton and tomato products produced in Xinjiang "based on information that reasonably indicates the use of detainee or prison labor and situations of forced labor."

On January 19, the then Secretary of State determined that since at least March 2017, the PRC's repressive actions against Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and other religious minority groups in Xinjiang constituted genocide and crimes against humanity.

On March 22, the U.S. Department of the Treasury imposed sanctions on Wang Junzheng, Secretary of the Party Committee of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), and Chen Mingguo, Director of the Xinjiang Public Security Bureau (XPSB), pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13818, which builds upon and implements the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, for their connection to serious human rights abuses against ethnic minorities in Xinjiang. The U.S. coordinated the timing of the sanctions with the European Union, United Kingdom, and Canada, which levied their own sanctions against Chinese individuals and entities on the same day. In response, on March 27, the Chinese government sanctioned two officials on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), a move the Secretary condemned as "baseless."

On May 12, the Secretary of State announced visa sanctions against Yu Hui, former office director of the Central Leading Group Preventing and Dealing with Heretical Religions in Chengdu, for his involvement in gross violations of human rights against Falun Gong practitioners.

Also on May 12, the United States cohosted a high-level virtual event on Xinjiang with 17 other countries and six NGOs. Speaking at the event, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations described Uyghurs' wish "to practice basic freedoms of religion, belief, expression, and movement..." In other multilateral action, the United States joined a group of 44 countries on June 22 in issuing a Canada-led joint statement expressing grave concern about the human rights situation in Xinjiang, as well as deep concern about the deterioration of fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong and the human rights situation in Tibet. On October 21, it joined a group of 43 countries delivering a joint statement on the human rights situation in Xinjiang at the UN General Assembly Third Committee.

On May 27, the Secretary condemned the PRC's sanctioning of a former USCIRF commissioner. The Secretary stated, "Beijing's attempts to intimidate and silence those speaking out for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of religion or belief, only draw additional international attention and scrutiny to its egregious abuses. This includes the ongoing crimes against humanity and genocide in Xinjiang, as well as its repression of religious and spiritual adherents, including Tibetan Buddhists, Christians, and Falun Gong practitioners."

Addressing the use of forced labor of ethnic and religious minorities in the polysilicon industry in Xinjiang, on June 24, the CBP issued a Withhold Release Order against Hoshine Silicone Industry Co., Ltd, a company headquartered in Xinjiang. The U.S. Department of Commerce added related Xinjiang-based companies to its list of entities subject to specific license requirements for export, reexport, and/or transfer in-country of specific items (the "Entity List"); the U.S. Department of Labor updated its List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor with related products; and the White House issued a fact sheet on forced labor in Xinjiang.

On July 9, the Bureau of Industry and Security of the U.S. Department of Commerce announced it would add 14 entities to the Entity List for being complicit in China's campaign of repression, mass detention, and high technology surveillance against Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and other members of Muslim minority groups in Xinjiang. The penalties prohibit U.S. companies from selling equipment or other goods to these firms.

On July 13, the U.S. Departments of State, Treasury, Commerce, Homeland Security, Labor, and the U.S. Trade Representative issued an updated Xinjiang Supply Chain Business Advisory that highlighted for businesses with potential supply chain and investment links to Xinjiang the risk of complicity with forced labor and human rights abuses.

On December 6, the Presidential press secretary announced the U.S. would not send diplomatic or official representation to the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic and Paralympics Games “given the PRC’s ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang and other human rights abuses.”

On December 10, the U.S. Department of State imposed visa restrictions on four current and former PRC officials – Shohrat Zakir, Erken Tuniyaz, Hu Lianhe, and Chen Mingguo – for their involvement in gross violations of human rights, specifically arbitrary detention of Uyghurs and other ethnic and religious minorities in Xinjiang. The U.S. Department of the Treasury also designated Shohrat Zakir and Erken Tuniyaz under the Global Magnitsky sanctions program in connection with serious human rights abuse. The Department of the Treasury also imposed financial sanctions on the company SenseTime Group Limited for its involvement in developing facial recognition programs aimed at identifying ethnic Uyghurs. On December 21, in reaction to the December 10 U.S. sanctions, the PRC announced sanctions against four USCIRF officials.

On December 23, the President signed the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act “to ensure that goods made with forced labor in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the [PRC] do not enter the United States market.” The legislation banned imports of goods made using forced labor of “Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tibetans, and members of other persecuted groups,” including goods mined, produced, or manufactured wholly or in part. The act directed the CBP to presume imports from Xinjiang were produced with forced labor unless the importer proved otherwise to CBP and imposed sanctions on foreign individuals responsible for forced labor in the region.

Since 1999, China has been designated as a CPC under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On November 15, 2021, the Secretary of State redesignated China as a CPC and identified the following sanction that accompanied the designation: the existing ongoing restriction on exports to China of crime control and detection instruments and equipment, under the Foreign

Relations Authorization Act of 1990 and 1991 (Public Law 101-246), pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act.

## TIBET 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

### Executive Summary

The constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC), which cites the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), states that citizens “enjoy freedom of religious belief,” but it limits protections for religious practice to “normal religious activities,” without defining “normal.” CCP regulations allow Chinese citizens to take part only in officially approved religious practices and stipulate religious activity “must not harm national security.” CCP regulations control all aspects of Tibetan Buddhism, including religious venues, groups, personnel, and schools, and prohibit “accepting domination by external forces,” which authorities said included Tibetans living outside the country – particularly the Dalai Lama. The State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) issued new regulations, effective May 1, entitled the “Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy,” that required all clergy to pledge allegiance to the CCP and socialism and created a database of “religious personnel” to track their performance. The SARA also issued new regulations on September 1 that required all religious schools to teach Xi Jinping Thought and adhere to the “Sinicization” of religion. In the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and other Tibetan areas, there were reports of forced disappearances, arrests, torture, physical abuse, and prolonged detentions without trial of monks, nuns, and other individuals due to their religious practices. There were also media reports stating prison authorities routinely sexually abused nuns. There were reports of individuals dying in custody after being beaten. There were reports of individuals who had been released from detention dying as a result of long-term illnesses and injuries suffered following beatings and mistreatment during incarceration. Authorities arrested writers and artists for promoting Tibetan language and culture. Authorities continued to arrest individuals for possessing photographs of, or writings by, the Dalai Lama. The government continued to restrict the size of Buddhist monasteries and other institutions and to implement a campaign begun in 2016 to evict monks and nuns from monasteries and to prohibit them from practicing elsewhere. The CCP continued to promote “Sinicization” policies that aimed to interpret religious ideas in accordance with CCP ideology and to emphasize loyalty to the CCP and the state. The CCP continued to implement the Administrative Measures for Religious Organizations regulations, released in 2020, that further formalized administrative procedures for Sinicizing all religions. Media reported authorities took measures to require Buddhist monasteries to translate texts from Tibetan to Mandarin, in what observers said constituted an ongoing attempt to erase the Tibetan language. On May 21, the government issued a white paper that asserted Tibet had always

been part of China and that the PRC would be responsible for the selection of Tibetan Buddhist leaders, including the Dalai Lama. Authorities continued to restrict the religious practices of monks, nuns, and laypersons. Travel and other restrictions hindered monastics and laypersons from engaging in traditional religious practices and pilgrimages. Repression, including arbitrary surveillance, increased around politically sensitive events, religious anniversaries, and the Dalai Lama's birthday. The government, citing COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, again canceled some religious festivals and limited access to religious sites for Tibetans but allowed Chinese tourists greater access to the same locations. Authorities intensified overt surveillance of monks and nuns and forced former political prisoners to use government-issued mobile phones and wear ankle bracelets containing recording and GPS tracking devices. One nongovernmental organization (NGO), the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), described surveillance methods at monasteries and nunneries, including ubiquitous closed-circuit cameras, police stations adjacent to or on the premises, monitoring monks' and nuns' internet and social media use, and thousands of government workers employed at temples, as being "of dystopian proportions." The government encouraged families to inform on their neighbors, and it attempted to control access to social media. It continued to force monasteries to display portraits of CCP leaders and the national flag and required Tibetans to replace images of the Dalai Lama and other lamas in their homes with portraits of prominent CCP leaders, including Chairman Mao Zedong and General Secretary and PRC President Xi Jinping. PRC authorities continued to restrict children from participating in many traditional religious festivals, going on pilgrimages during school holidays, or receiving religious education. As part of efforts to Sinicize the population, authorities aggressively promoted Mandarin-language-only instruction. According to a report by the NGO Tibet Action Institute (TAI), the government required nearly 80 percent of Tibetan children to attend government-run boarding schools, where they were separated from their families, suffering emotional and psychological harm, and were at risk of losing connection to their language and culture. Authorities continued to engage in widespread interference in monastic practices, including by appointing government and CCP personnel and government-approved monks to manage religious institutions. The government continued to control the selection of Tibetan Buddhist lamas and supervised their religious and political education. It continued to force monks and nuns to undergo political training in state ideology. Religious leaders and government employees were often required to denounce the Dalai Lama and express allegiance to the government-recognized Panchen Lama, Gyaltzen Norbu. Officials routinely made public statements denigrating the Dalai Lama and promoting the Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism. President Xi visited the TAR on July 21-22, where he urged

Tibetans to “follow the party.” Authorities continued in state media to justify interference with Tibetan Buddhist monasteries by associating the monasteries with “separatism” and pro-independence activities.

Some Tibetans continued to encounter societal discrimination when seeking employment, engaging in business, and traveling for pilgrimage, according to multiple sources.

The PRC continued to tightly restrict diplomatic access to the TAR and to deny U.S. embassy in Beijing’s requests to visit the area. No U.S. diplomats were allowed to visit the TAR during the year. U.S. officials repeatedly raised concerns about religious freedom in Tibet with Chinese government counterparts at multiple levels. U.S. officials, including the Secretary of State, U.S. Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, who was appointed in December, Charge d’Affaires, and other embassy officers continued sustained and concerted efforts to advocate for the rights of Tibetans to preserve, practice, teach, and develop their religious traditions and language without interference from the government. U.S. officials underscored that decisions on the succession of the Dalai Lama should be made solely by the Tibetan people, free from interference, and they raised concerns about the continued disappearance of Panchen Lama Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, missing since 1995. During the year, the U.S. government used a variety of diplomatic tools to promote religious freedom and accountability in Tibet, including continuing visa restrictions on PRC government and CCP officials that it had determined to be “substantially involved in the formulation or execution of policies related to access for foreigners to Tibetan areas,” pursuant to the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act of 2018. In July, the U.S. Secretary of State met with Central Tibetan Administration representative Ngodup Dongchung in New Delhi. In April, the Department of State spokesperson said, “We respect Tibetans’ right to select, educate, and venerate their own leaders, like the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, according to their own beliefs, and without government interference.” The embassy and consulates used social media to deliver direct messaging about religious freedom in Tibet to millions of Chinese citizens.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

According to official data from the 2020 estimate of the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the total population of the TAR is approximately 3,648,000, of which Tibetans make up approximately 90 percent. Han Chinese make up approximately 8 percent. Other ethnicities comprise the remainder. Some experts, however, believe the number of Han Chinese and other non-Tibetans living there is

significantly underreported. The majority of ethnic Tibetans in the PRC live in the TAR, in Tibetan autonomous prefectures (TAPs), and in counties in Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan Provinces. Official census data show Tibetans constitute approximately 24.4 percent of the total population in Qinghai Province, 2.1 percent in Sichuan Province, 1.8 percent in Gansu Province, and 0.3 percent in Yunnan Province, although the percentage of Tibetans is much higher within prefectures and counties of these provinces designated as autonomous for Tibetans.

Most ethnic Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism, although a sizeable minority practices Bon, a pre-Buddhist indigenous religion. Small minorities practice Islam, Catholicism, or Protestantism. Some scholars estimate there are as many as 400,000 Bon followers across the Tibetan Plateau, most of whom also follow the Dalai Lama and consider themselves to be Tibetan Buddhists. Scholars estimate there are up to 5,000 Tibetan Muslims and 700 Tibetan Catholics in the TAR. Other residents of traditionally Tibetan areas include Han Chinese, many of whom practice Buddhism (including Tibetan Buddhism), Taoism, Confucianism, or traditional folk religions, or profess atheism, as well as Hui Muslims and non-Tibetan Catholics and Protestants.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

The PRC constitution, which cites the leadership of the CCP and the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong and Xi Jinping Thought, states that citizens “enjoy freedom of religious belief,” but it limits protections for religious practice to “normal religious activities,” without defining “normal.” The constitution bans the state, public organizations, and individuals from compelling citizens to believe in, or not believe in, any religion. It says religion may not be used to disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the educational system. The constitution states religious bodies and affairs are not to be “subject to any foreign control.” The government recognizes five official religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism. Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned “patriotic religious associations” representing these religions are permitted to register with the government and legally hold worship services or other religious ceremonies and activities.

CCP regulations regarding religion are issued by the CCP’s United Front Work Department (UFD). The UFD’s Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Work manages religious affairs through the SARA.

The UFWD controls the selection of Tibetan religious leaders, including lamas. Regulations stipulate that, depending on the perceived geographic area of influence of the lama, relevant administrative entities may deny permission for a lama to be recognized as reincarnated (a tenet of Tibetan Buddhism), and that these administrative entities must approve reincarnations. The UFWD claims the right to deny recognition of reincarnations of high lamas of “especially great influence.” The regulations also state no foreign organization or individual may interfere in the selection of reincarnate lamas, and all reincarnate lamas must be reborn within China. The CCP maintains a registry of officially recognized reincarnate lamas.

Regulations issued by the UFWD allow Chinese citizens to take part only in officially approved religious practices; these regulations assert CCP control over all aspects of religions, including religious venues, groups, personnel, and schools. Through local regulations issued under the framework of the national-level Management Regulation of Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries, governments of the TAR and other autonomous Tibetan areas control the registration of monasteries, nunneries, and other Tibetan Buddhist religious centers. The regulations also give the CCP formal control over building and managing religious structures and require monasteries to obtain official permission to hold large-scale religious events or gatherings.

The central government’s Regulations on Religious Affairs require religious groups to register with the government, impose fines on landlords who provide facilities for unauthorized religious activities, and restrict contact with overseas religious institutions. The regulations require religious groups to seek approval to travel abroad and prohibit “accepting domination by external forces,” which authorities say include Tibetans living outside the country, particularly the Dalai Lama. The regulations submit religious schools to the same oversight as places of worship and impose restrictions on religious groups conducting business or investments, including placing limits on the amount of donations they may receive, thereby constraining property ownership and development. Publication and distribution of literature containing religious content must follow guidelines determined by the State Publishing Administration. Publication of religious material must also conform to guidelines determined by the Propaganda Department of the CCP Central Committee.

The regulations also require that religious activity “must not harm national security.” While the regulations stipulate that religious groups must abide by the law, safeguard national unity, and respond to “religious extremism,” the term

“extremism” is undefined. Measures to safeguard unity and respond to “religious extremism” include monitoring groups, individuals, and institutions, and recommending penalties such as suspending groups and canceling clergy credentials. The regulations stipulate that the online activities of religious groups must be approved by the provincial UFWD.

On January 1, the “Regulations on Counter-espionage Security of the Tibet Autonomous Region” came into force. According to the regulations, “counter-espionage” in the TAR includes activities such as “ethnic separatism,” “ethnic conflict,” and “using religion to endanger national security.”

On January 18, the SARA issued new regulations, effective May 1, entitled “Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy,” that require all clergy to pledge allegiance to the CCP and socialism and that create a database of “religious personnel” to track their performance. Article 3 of the regulations states religious clergy “should love the motherland, support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, support the socialist system, abide by the constitution, laws, regulations, and rules, practice the core values of socialism, adhere to the principle of independent and self-administered religion in China, adhere to the direction of the Sinicization of religion in China, and operate to maintain national unity, religious harmony, and social stability.” Article 6 states, in part, that clergy should “resist illegal religious activities and religious extremist ideology, and resist infiltration by foreign forces using religion.” The regulations also provide that “entrance to religious places of worship should be regulated through strict gatekeeping, verification of identity, and registration.” The regulations also stipulate that religious organizations and institutions will be held responsible for the behaviors of individual religious clergy. Article 7 stipulates religious staff should “focus on improving their own quality, improving their cultural and moral literacy, studying the contents of doctrines and regulations that are conducive to social harmony, progress of the times, and health and civilization, and integrate them into preaching, and play a role in promoting the Sinicization of religion in our country.”

The SARA also issued new regulations on September 1 requiring all religious schools to teach Xi Jinping Thought and adhere to the “Sinicization of religion.” The 2020 “Guidelines for National Security in Universities, Primary, and Secondary Schools” require school curriculums to ensure students “adhere to the correct path” by “strengthening the party’s leadership, enhancing political ideology, and practicing core socialist values.”

Children younger than the age of 18 are prohibited from participating in religious activities and receiving religious education, even in schools run by religious organizations. Enforcement and implementation of these rules vary widely across and within regions. One regulation states that no individual may use religion to hinder the national education system and that no religious activities may be held in schools. These regulations have effectively barred Tibetan youth from entering monasteries prior to reaching 18 years of age.

In January 2020, the government adopted the “Regulations on the Establishment of a Model Area for Ethnic Unity and Progress in the Tibet Autonomous Region.” These require “equal opportunities” for non-Tibetan ethnic groups at all levels of government and in schools, private business companies, religious centers, and the military in the TAR.

A government policy introduced in 2018 requires Tibetan monks and nuns to undergo political training in CCP ideology. Monks and nuns must not only demonstrate competence in religious studies, but must also show “political reliability,” “moral integrity capable of impressing the public,” and a willingness to “play an active role at critical moments.”

Self-immolation (setting oneself on fire as a form of protest) is considered homicide, and family members, teachers, and religious leaders may be charged as accessories to homicide if a relative, pupil, or follower chooses to self-immolate.

To establish formal places of worship, religious organizations must receive approval from the local UFWD, both when the facility is proposed and again prior to the first time any services are held at that location. Religious organizations must submit dozens of documents to register during these approval processes, including detailed management plans of their religious activities, exhaustive financial records, and personal information on all staff members. Religious communities not going through the formal registration process may not legally have an established facility or worship meeting space; they must seek a separate approval from CCP authorities each time they want to reserve a space for worship, such as by renting a hotel or an apartment. Worshipping in a space without prior approval, either through the formal registration process or by seeking an approval for each service, is considered an illegal religious activity that may be criminally or administratively punished.

Individuals must apply to the TAR CCP Committee to take up religious orders, and the committee may deny any application. Regulations also require monks and

nuns to obtain permission from officials in both the originating and receiving counties before traveling to other prefectures or to county-level cities within the TAR to “practice their religion,” engage in religious activities, study, or teach. TAPs outside the TAR have similar regulations.

At the central level, the CCP Central Committee’s Central Tibet Work Coordination Group and the UFWD are responsible for developing and implementing religious management policies, which are carried out with support from the five state-sanctioned patriotic religious associations: The Three-Self Patriotic Movement (Protestant), the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, the Chinese Taoist Association, the Islamic Association of China, and the Buddhist Association of China (BAC). At local levels, party leaders and branches of the UFWD, SARA, and BAC are required to coordinate implementation of religious policies in monasteries.

CCP members and retired government officials, including Tibetans, are required to be atheists and are forbidden from engaging in religious practices. CCP members who are found to belong to religious organizations are subject to various types of punishment, including termination of their employment and expulsion from the CCP.

### **Government Practices**

Human rights and media reported authorities exercised strict control over telephone and online communications in Tibetan areas. As a result, some disappearances, arrests, detentions, and deaths that occurred in prior years only became known during the year. Limited access to information, as well as travel restrictions, due both to government policies limiting access to Tibetan areas and to the COVID-19 pandemic, made it difficult to ascertain the exact number of individuals imprisoned because of their religious beliefs or affiliation, determine the charges brought against them, or assess the extent and severity of abuses they suffered. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize some incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

The *Taiwan Times* reported authorities in “reeducation camps” starved women with substandard meals, and some died of malnutrition. One survivor, Adhi, said she obtained extra food by providing “sexual favors” demanded by the Han Chinese bureaucrats overseeing the detention center.

The India-based NGO Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) reported that in September 2019, authorities detained Norsang, a resident of Tachu Township in Nagchu (Chinese: Naqu) Prefecture, TAR, for refusing to participate in “patriotic education” during the run-up to the 70th anniversary of the founding of the PRC. TCHRD later reported, “In May 2021, it was learned that Norsang had died in custody a week after his detention in 2019.” A source told TCHRD that Norsang died as a result of authorities’ severely beating and torturing him.

The NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported in January that Tibetan monk Tenzin Nyima, after his release from custody in October 2020, died in late December 2020 or early January 2021 from injuries sustained while in custody. HRW said Nyima, from Dza Wonpo Monastery in Dza Wonpo Township, Kardze (Ganzi) TAP, Sichuan Province was initially arrested in November 2019 for distributing pamphlets and shouting slogans calling for Tibetan independence. Authorities released him in May 2020 but rearrested him in August for posting news of his initial arrest online. Sources told HRW that when he was released the second time, Nyima was unable to speak or move and suffered from an acute respiratory infection, which they believed was due to beatings, severe malnourishment, and mistreatment while in custody.

The India-based Tibetan media outlet *Phayul* reported in May that Norsang (no last name), a man held incommunicado after his 2019 detention for refusing to participate in government-led political reeducation training, was allegedly tortured to death. According to *Phayul*, Norsang died in 2019 while in the custody of local security officials, who did not reveal his death until May. Authorities said Norsang committed suicide to escape debts, but a source stated he was not in debt at the time of his arrest.

There were no reported cases of Tibetans self-immolating during the year as a means of protesting against government policies, compared with no individuals in 2020 and one in 2019. In January, the Central Tibetan Administration reported one case of self-immolation that occurred in 2015 but was previously unreported. The man, Shurmo, was 26 when he self-immolated on September 17, 2015, in Shagchukha Village, Driru County, Nagchu Prefecture, TAR. According to ICT, from 2009 to December 2019, 157 Tibetans set themselves on fire in protest against what they said was the occupation of Tibet and abuses of Tibetans’ religion and culture under PRC rule. Experts and local sources attributed the decrease in the number of self-immolations to tighter control measures by authorities and the

fear that family members and associates of self-immolators might be punished, including by being charged as accessories to homicide.

The whereabouts of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, recognized as the 11th Panchen Lama by the Dalai Lama and most Tibetan Buddhists, remained unknown since his 1995 forced disappearance by Chinese authorities. Nyima was six years old at the time he and his family were reportedly abducted. The Panchen Lama is considered by the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism to be the second-most-prominent leader after the Dalai Lama. On April 25, the Tibetan diaspora marked the occasion of Nyima's 32nd birthday. Advocacy groups called on the government to release him and allow him to resume his religious duties.

Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported in August that according to TCHRD, at least 40 enforced disappearances had occurred in Tibetan areas over the prior three years. Victims included Buddhist clergy, writers, artists, farmers, community leaders, students, and other intellectuals. TCHRD stated the majority of those disappeared were described by authorities as suspects in cases of "endangering state security" or "disclosing state secrets." According to TCHRD, "Tibetans continue to disappear every year, crippling family life and community cohesion." Pema Gyal, a researcher at the London-based rights group Tibet Watch, told RFA's Tibetan Service, "There are so many Tibetans who are arrested by the Chinese government, yet their whereabouts and the reasons for their arrests remain unknown for a very long time."

RFA reported that on March 23, the family of monk Rinchen Tsultrim learned that authorities had sentenced him to four and a half years in prison after a closed trial at which he was denied access to an attorney. Authorities arrested Tsultrim in 2019 on suspicion of working to "split the country" and held him incommunicado for two years. His sister told RFA that prior to his arrest, authorities warned Tsultrim to stop expressing his thoughts and writing on a range of Tibetan political, social, and cultural issues. At year's end, Tsultrim was being held in Mianyang Prison in Sichuan Province.

Sources reported that the whereabouts of several monks remained unknown at year's end. These included Dorje Rabten, who in September 2018 protested against government policies restricting young people from becoming monks; Tenzin Gelek, who had protested Dorje's detention; Lobsang Thamke, who was arrested in 2018 and sentenced on July 30, 2021, to four years in prison on unknown charges; Lobsang Dorje, who was arrested in August 2018; and Thubpa,

whom police took from the Trotsik Monastery in Ngaba (Aba) County, Sichuan Province, toward the end of 2017.

Sources told media that authorities routinely physically abused Tibetan prisoners. RFA reported in September that authorities released Tibetan Monk Thabgey Gyatso after he served 12 years of his 15-year sentence for participating in protests in Lhasa in 2008. Sources told RFA that “due to harsh treatment in the prison, his vision and overall health have become very weak.” For the first year following his arrest, his whereabouts were unknown.

In February, the *Taiwan Times* reported prison staff in “reeducation camps” routinely tortured women, including nuns, by beating them and shocked them with cattle prods. Rinzen Kunsang, a Tibetan woman who was arrested for taking part in a demonstration, reported being handcuffed, stripped, prodded with electric batons, and beaten with bamboo sticks, often until the sticks broke. Other Tibetan women reported guards hung them on the wall, sometimes upside down, and hit them with electric batons. According to the *Taiwan Times*, Ngawang Tsepak, a nun, was taken down only after both her shoulders became dislocated. Ngawang Jhampa, another nun, reported that she was beaten with chairs and sticks and shocked with electric cattle prods. Several survivors said the guards set dogs on the prisoners. Gyaltzen Chodon, a nun, reported that guards tread on their hands with iron-tipped boots; kicked them in the face and stomach; placed buckets full of urine and feces on their heads and struck the buckets with sticks; kicked them in the breasts and genitals until they were bleeding; and burned them with lighted cigarettes.

According to the *Taiwan Times* report, prison authorities routinely sexually degraded nuns and raped them. One source said nuns were told their bodies “belonged to the CCP” rather than to the monasteries, commenting that these were not merely acts of violence, because once raped, a nun would consider herself to have broken the vows of celibacy and feel unworthy of continuing as a nun, leaving her no option but to lead a secular life. One nun said guards forced the nuns to come out naked and prostrate themselves in front of the monks. One survivor reported guards tying electric cords around her breasts and shocking her, while another reported guards setting dogs on the women while they were naked.

The *Taiwan Times* reported that in a prison in Lhasa, authorities raped 25 women after they wore Tibetan attire rather than their prison uniforms to celebrate the Tibetan New Year.

Sources told RFA that authorities sometimes released prisoners in failing health prior to the end of their sentences. RFA reported in March that Gangbu Rikgye Nyima, serving a 10-year sentence for participation in protests, was released in February, a year early. According to RFA, the release came about because Gangbu's health had deteriorated badly due to her being beaten and otherwise physically abused in prison.

Voice of America (VOA) reported that on February 17, authorities detained three teenagers for creating a WeChat group called "White Rocky Mountain Club," a reference to a local Tibetan Buddhist deity. According to VOA, the youths organized the chat group to celebrate the Tibetan New Year from February 12 to 14, but authorities stated the group had violated government rules requiring all WeChat groups to register with local regulatory authorities so the government could monitor chat content. VOA reported police badly beat the three boys, causing one to suffer a broken leg, requiring hospitalization.

According to HRW, Kunchok Jinpa, a tour guide and environmental activist, died in a hospital in Lhasa on February 6, less than three months after being transferred there from prison without his family's knowledge. Local sources said he had suffered a brain hemorrhage and was paralyzed. Authorities arrested Jinpa in 2013 for allegedly passing information to foreign media about local environmental and other protests in his region and sentenced him to 21 years in prison for leaking "state secrets." Prior to his death, his family had no news of Kunchok Jinpa's whereabouts since his detention in 2013. The HRW China director stated, "Kunchok Jinpa's death is yet another grim case of a wrongfully imprisoned Tibetan dying from mistreatment. Chinese authorities responsible for arbitrary detention, torture or ill-treatment, and the death of people in their custody should be held accountable."

TCHRD released a political prisoner database in December that documented that authorities had detained 5,500 Tibetan political prisoners since 1990. VOA reported that authorities had released more than 3,000 of those but continued to hold more than 1,800 at year's end.

RFA reported in March that the government conducted a wave of arrests in Lhasa and along Tibet's border with India. Names of those arrested were not reported, but RFA indicated the arrests occurred ahead of a month of politically sensitive anniversaries beginning in March, including the March 10 anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan uprising against Chinese rule.

In April, RFA reported officials in Sichuan Province arrested Go Sherab Gyatso, a monk at Kirti Monastery in Ngaba County, Sichuan Province, and a well-known Tibetan educator and writer, although at the time his whereabouts were unknown. The NGO Tibet Watch reported in December that authorities secretly sentenced Go Sherab Gyatso in November to 10 years in prison for “inciting secession.”

According to Tibet Watch sources, local authorities did not reveal the exact date of his sentencing or where he would serve his sentence. Authorities had detained Gyatso twice before, from 1998 to 2002 for possessing a portrait of the Dalai Lama and from 2008 to 2009 for unspecified reasons. RFA reported he was well known for his writings in support of the Dalai Lama. In July, four UN experts, including the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, wrote the government about “the alleged arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance of two Tibetan Buddhists, Mr. Go Sherab Gyatso and Mr. Rinchen Tsultrim.” A government letter in response from September confirmed the detentions.

RFA reported in April that authorities arrested six Tibetan writers, monks, and former political prisoners between March and April in Sichuan Province. Sources told RFA that authorities in Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province, arrested Gangkye Drubpa Kyab, Sey Nam, Gangbu Yudrum, and Gang Tsering Dolma, as well as two other unknown individuals, between February and March, but that due to the PRC’s “blockade” of information, no information was available about the charges or the whereabouts of the individuals. No more information regarding their arrest or detention came to light by year’s end.

In April, Tibet.net, a website run by the Central Tibetan Administration, a representative civil support organization based in Dharamsala, India, reported the arrest of several Tibetans living in Driru County, Nagchu Prefecture, TAR, who were suspected of contacting Tibetans abroad via telephone and social media. The report identified Gyajin as one of those detained but was unable to identify the other individuals. According to the NGO Free Tibet, Driru County is one of the most severely and militarily controlled areas in the TAR, dating back to May 2013, when residents staged a protest against government-affiliated companies that had begun extraction activities on their sacred mountain, Naglha Zamba.

Tibet Watch reported that in July, authorities shut down a private Tibetan-language school in Golog (Guoluo) TAP, Qinghai Province, without citing a reason, and in August, they arrested Rinchen Kyi, one of its longest-serving teachers. Authorities charged Kyi with inciting separatism. Sources from the area said the school’s closure was politically motivated because its primary language of instruction was Tibetan and it provided Tibetan culture-based learning for its students.

Human rights groups reported PRC authorities continued to criminalize the sharing or possession of photos of, or statements by, the Dalai Lama. RFA reported in August that authorities in Dza Wonpo Township, Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province, raided homes and arrested 19 monks and 40 laypersons for possessing photographs of the Dalai Lama. Police called a mandatory meeting three days later for local residents aged 18 and older. A source said, “The focus of the meeting was to warn people not to keep any pictures of the Dalai Lama or to share any information over their cell phones.” Police then searched homes in the township looking for banned photographs. Authorities also inspected a local old age home on the pretext of cleaning the facility, confiscated a number of banned photographs, and gave residents pictures of President Xi and other Chinese leaders to put up in their place. The meeting and raids followed meetings earlier in the year in Dza Wonpo in which authorities forced Tibetans to sign a document pledging not to keep or circulate photographs of the Dalai Lama, on penalty of criminal prosecution and denial of state aid, according to sources. Tibet.net also reported the event, saying authorities detained 121 Tibetans in Dza Wonpo for approximately one month and forced them to undergo political “reeducation.” The monks were arrested after participating in informal Tibetan-language classes and language preservation groups on social media. According to the report, authorities subsequently released all but three individuals.

According to Free Tibet and *Phayul*, in late October, authorities sentenced former monk and writer Thupten Lobsang Lhundup (known by his pen name Dhi Lhaden) to four years in prison for “disrupting social order.” Authorities detained Lhaden in June 2019 in Chengdu City, Sichuan Province, and held him incommunicado until his trial. A former monk in Drepung and Sera monasteries in Lhasa, Lhundup authored books and essays criticizing government policies. According to TCHRD, prosecutors used his book, “The Art of Passive Resistance,” as evidence against him. TCHRD stated the “charge of ‘disrupting social order’ is a catchall term employed by the party-state to silence dissent and preserve the culture of censorship.”

Free Tibet reported that on March 14, local police in Dzato County, Qinghai Province, detained and interrogated four Tibetans for climbing a mountain to pray and burn incense. In addition, police confiscated their identity cards and checked their phones to see whether their WeChat accounts were registered with the government as required. Police arrested one of the men. They warned the parents and relatives of the four men that they would be held responsible if a similar incident occurred.

RFA reported in December that authorities in Ngaba County, Sichuan Province, sentenced Tibetan monk Lobsang Thinley to five years in prison for “spreading books and lectures” of the Dalai Lama. According to the report, authorities arrested Lobsang in July for distributing information about the Dalai Lama, although they did not inform his family that he had been arrested or sentenced until September. Sources told RFA that authorities denied him access to legal counsel. According to sources, Lobsang had been detained previously for similar reasons.

A July report by HRW stated authorities in 2019 raided Tengdro Monastery, Shekar town, Tingri County, TAR, beat several monks and villagers, and detained approximately 20 individuals. According to HRW, the monks were held on suspicion of having exchanged messages with Tibetans abroad, contributing to earthquake relief money sent to Tibetans at their sister monastery in Nepal following a 2015 earthquake in that country, and possessing photographs or literature related to the Dalai Lama. The report said that following a secret trial, four monks received “extraordinarily harsh sentences” ranging from five to 20 years.

According to multiple sources, authorities often forced political prisoners, particularly monks and nuns, to perform patriotic songs and dances praising the CCP, and to watch propaganda films. If participants seemed uninterested, authorities considered it evidence of disloyalty to the state and subjected them to severe punishment, including beatings, and refused them permission to receive gifts of food or clothing from visiting family members.

Media and human rights groups reported local officials in Tibetan areas explicitly stated supporters of the Dalai Lama and other religious leaders could be arrested under the government’s nationwide anti-organized crime program and that Tibetans were told to inform on anyone who “links up with the Dalai clique.”

The government continued to place restrictions on the size of Buddhist monasteries and other institutions and to implement a campaign begun in 2016 to evict monks and nuns from monasteries. While exact numbers were difficult to ascertain, human rights groups and local sources said that between 2016 and 2019 (the most recent information available), authorities evicted between 6,000 and 17,000 Tibetan and Han Chinese monks and nuns from Larung Gar and Yachen Gar Tibetan Buddhist Institutes, both in Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province. According to local sources, authorities continued to prohibit monks or nuns from returning to these locations and rebuilding these sites. Monastics expelled from Larung Gar

and Yachen Gar Tibetan Buddhist Institutes were specifically prohibited from transferring to other monasteries to continue their religious education.

RFA reported in August that authorities shut down Hongcheng Tibetan Monastery in Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province, and evicted an unknown number of nuns and monks. According to RFA, videos of the incident showed monks at Hongcheng Monastery, also known as Yulingta Monastery, holding up banners that read “Forcible defrocking of monks is illegal and unacceptable!” and other protest slogans. RFA reported videos showed nuns “wailed in mourning” at being made to leave, while others shouted “Stop this! Stop this!” and “Film everything!” Local officials denied the operation had occurred. One foreign-based commentator told RFA the government was “getting ready to eliminate all Tibetan temples and monasteries within the majority Han Chinese area of China.”

During the year, the government reportedly continued its policy of resettling previously nomadic Tibetans in government-subsidized housing units. In many areas, these were located near township and county government seats or along major roads that had no nearby monasteries where resettled villagers could worship. The government prohibited construction of new religious sites in these areas without prior approval. Traditionally, Tibetan villages were clustered around monasteries, which provided religious and other services to members of the community. Many Tibetans continued to view these relocation measures as CCP and government efforts to dilute religious belief and weaken the ties between monasteries and communities.

Free Tibet reported that on October 21-22, security officials forcibly expelled 30 teenage student monks from Jakyung Monastery and 50 teenage student monks from Deetsa Monastery in Hualong Hui Autonomous County, Qinghai Province, on the grounds that individuals younger than 18 were not permitted to enroll in monasteries. They took the youths home and informed them they could no longer wear monks’ robes or study at the monasteries. Free Tibet stated, “Such a directive limits young Tibetan Buddhists’ access to their cultural heritage, as monasteries serve as an essential resource for Tibetan language and cultural learning... Furthermore, students are a vital part of a monastery’s structure; providing senior monks assistance in their duties to ensure smoother operation of the monastery[.]”

International media and NGOs reported the government continued carrying out its 2019-2023 five-year plan to Sinicize Buddhism in China by emphasizing loyalty to the CCP and the state. The plan included Tibetan Buddhism, with the involvement

of the state-run BAC. The CCP's Administrative Measures for Religious Organizations, promulgated in 2020, further formalized administrative procedures for Sinicizing all religions, including Tibetan Buddhism, to "follow the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics" and "correctly handle the relationship between national law and canon[.]"

The Catholic news outlet *AsiaNews* reported that new SARA regulations entitled "Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy," which took effect on May 1, placed more ideological controls over the training, selection, and monitoring of clergy, including emphasizing allegiance to the CCP and socialism. On February 11, *Bitter Winter*, an online publication that tracks religious liberty and human rights abuses in the country, published an English language translation and analysis of the new regulations. According to *Bitter Winter*, registration in the government database was "complicated." Individuals who were not listed in the database but claimed to be clergy would be committing a crime. Individuals unable to obtain a "clergy card" would include anyone not belonging to one of the five officially recognized patriotic religious associations, including the BAC. *Bitter Winter* stated individuals had to prove they "support[ed] the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and support[ed] the socialist system." According to *AsiaNews*, under the regulations, "Living buddhas... will not be able to exercise any ministry, nor will they be considered true reincarnations without the permission of the [CCP]." *Bitter Winter* stated the regulations created "an Orwellian system of surveillance, and strengthen[ed] the already strict control on all clergy."

Associated Press (AP) reported that in June, President Xi visited Lhasa to mark the 70th anniversary of PRC control over Tibet, the first time he had visited Tibet in more than a decade. AP reported that during the visit, one sign on public display read, "Xi Jinping's new socialist ideology with Chinese characteristics is the guide for the whole party and all nationalities to fight for the great rejuvenation of China." At Jokhang Temple, considered the most sacred temple in Tibet and one of the holiest sites in Tibetan Buddhism, head monk Lhakpa said the Dalai Lama was not its spiritual leader. Asked who was, he said, "Xi Jinping."

RFA reported on a conference for more than 500 monks and nuns held at the Tso-Ngon Buddhist University in Xining City, Qinghai Province, September 27 to 30. Attendees, including religious figures and students from Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist universities, were instructed that Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and study centers must begin to translate classroom texts from Tibetan into Mandarin. RFA stated this new policy was designed to encourage the Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism and to further enforce the government's effort to promote Mandarin as

the national language. According to RFA, it was unclear if the policy would also include the gradual translation into Chinese of the thousands of classical Buddhist scriptures also written in Tibetan, many of which were originally translated from Sanskrit. Geshe Lhakdor, director of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, India, said Mandarin was not able to communicate the full range of meaning of Buddhist doctrine. He said, “There is no good intention behind this plan.” In an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* in November, a Tibetan academic based in the United States wrote, “The ultimate goal is for future lamas and monks to learn Buddhism only in Mandarin – paving the way for the erasure of the Tibetan language.”

On May 21, the PRC government issued a white paper that asserted Tibet had always been part of China and that the PRC would be responsible for the selection of Tibetan Buddhist leaders, including the Dalai Lama. The government stated it shall be in control of important Tibetan Buddhist traditions, including the right to select which lamas would be “authorized” to reincarnate, and will ensure that reincarnation of living buddhas “has been carried out in an orderly manner in accordance with laws, regulations, religious rituals, and historical conventions.” In addition, the paper stated Tibetan Buddhism would be required to conform to the CCP and socialism with Chinese characteristics.

The TAR government reportedly continued to maintain tight control over the use of Tibetan Buddhist religious relics and declared them, religious buildings, and religious institutions to be state property. Sources continued to report that while authorities permitted some traditional religious ceremonies and practices, they continued to exercise control over the activities of religious leaders and religious gatherings of laypersons, confining many such activities to officially designated places of worship and preventing monks from traveling to villages for politically sensitive events and religious ceremonies. Religious figures and laypersons frequently reported difficulty traveling to monasteries outside their home regions, both within the TAR and in other parts of the country. Travelers said they encountered roadblocks and police checkpoints surrounding major monasteries, with security personnel often checking their identity cards and refusing entry to nonresidents. Tibetans wishing to visit family members residing in monasteries noted frequent refusals or limits on their ability to visit. Local sources reported similar restrictions on their movements and said checkpoints and fear of detention prevented them from visiting monasteries and participating in religious events. Many monks expelled from their monasteries after 2008 protests in Lhasa and other areas, such as Ngaba County, Sichuan Province, had not returned, some because of government prohibitions.

Free Tibet reported in July that the CCP launched a “Party History” campaign across China in February in anticipation of the CCP’s 100-year anniversary in July. As part of the campaign, the CCP sent party cadres to visit homes, monasteries, and schools across Tibet to spread “correct” party history and policies. In Yulshul (Yushu) TAP, Qinghai Province, party officials and police visited families and public schools to spread party propaganda. In May, party officials held a series of propaganda events at Dorje Drak Monastery Gongkar (Gongga) County, TAR. Monks and nuns were required to write their names on a banner that said, “Good monks and nuns who appreciate the favor of the party, listen to the party, follow the party.” In late June, CCP officials held propaganda events at monasteries in Lhasa, Chamdo, and Nagchu Prefectures, TAR, to mark the 100th anniversary of the CCP and the 70th anniversary of PRC control over Tibet.

According to sources, authorities continued to restrict many major monasteries across the Tibetan Plateau from holding large-scale religious events, citing COVID-19 concerns. Local sources confirmed to Free Tibet that many Tibetan monasteries and other religious sites were closed during the year, with the authorities saying the closures were COVID-19 precautions. Free Tibet reported that in January, citing COVID-19 concerns, the government issued a directive forbidding all “outsiders” from entering all areas of Larung Gar (former home to the Tibetan Buddhist Institute, which authorities had destroyed) and banning large-scale gatherings and religious activities there. Many of these sources said officials were using pandemic restrictions to prevent individuals from participating in religious activities.

RFA reported that authorities cancelled public religious festivals and prayer ceremonies for Losar (the Tibetan New Year) in February and closed major religious sites in Lhasa, including the Potala Palace and Drepung and Sera monasteries, citing COVID-19 restrictions. Local sources said Tibetans were also barred from holding social gatherings and visiting monasteries and temples in Nyagrong (Xinlong) County, Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province, and authorities restricted travel in Tibetan-populated areas in Qinghai Province ahead of the start of Losar. A source told RFA that in advance of Losar, authorities imposed a 10:00 p.m. curfew in Golog (Guoluo) and Matoe (Maduo) Counties in Golog TAP, Qinghai Province in the name of “social stability” and “sanitation.” According to the source, security personnel were dispatched to restaurants, hotels, internet cafes, and “all places of recreation.” Police checked identification cards. The source said, “Anyone caught out after curfew risks punishment, including imprisonment and severe physical abuse.”

Local sources said the government continued to suppress religious activities it viewed as vehicles for political dissent. There were reports that local authorities again ordered many monasteries and laypersons not to celebrate or organize any public gatherings to celebrate the Dalai Lama's 86th birthday on July 6, or to commemorate the anniversary of the March 10, 1959, Tibetan uprising or a March 14, 2008, outbreak of unrest across the Tibetan Plateau. As in prior years, TAR authorities banned monks and nuns from leaving their monasteries and nunneries during such times, and pilgrimage sites were heavily policed. Local sources reported that officials visited monasteries in the TAR and in Sichuan, Qinghai, and Gansu Provinces and warned staff not to host "outside visitors" on the Dalai Lama's birthday. Sources stated officials continued to urge Tibetans to report on foreign visitors to these areas and other "suspicious activities," a policy that has been in place for many years.

According to Tibet Watch, the government banned all religious activities, social events, and private gatherings in Ngaba County, Sichuan Province, to celebrate the 80th birthday on August 8 of the 11th Kirti Rinpoche, Lobsang Tenzin Jigme Yeshe Gyamtso Rinpoche of Kirti Monastery, who is currently living in India. The ban included Kirti Monastery and its associated monasteries in Ngaba and villages in the neighboring area of Zoege. Sources told Tibet Watch authorities imposed special restrictions on social media.

ICT reported that in April, the CCP circulated a new six-point code of conduct for CCP members in the TAR that explicitly forbade party members from all forms of religiosity in public and private life, despite reports that many local government officials held religious beliefs. ICT stated the code of conduct was "significant for being perhaps the first party regulation that clearly and comprehensively details the specific types of religiosity forbidden for party members in the TAR," including wearing rosary beads or religious imagery, forwarding or "liking" religious materials online, and circumambulating mountains and lakes. The code of conduct also required CCP members to actively promote the party's antireligion stance among their relatives, refrain from setting up altars or hang religious imagery in homes, and seek party approval before inviting religious personnel to conduct rituals for customary occasions such as weddings and funerals. The TAR regional government punished CCP members who made pilgrimages to India or sent their children to study with Tibetans living abroad.

In May, media outlet *Phayul* reported authorities continued to ban Tibetans and civil servants from participating in religious events during Saga Dawa, the month-

long festival that marks the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death. Sources said authorities threatened there would be "serious consequences" for individuals who defied the ban. Authorities intensified surveillance of, and restrictions on, access to the Jokhang Temple complex on the 15th day of Saga Dawa, the holiest day of the month.

According to local sources, police maintained heavy security during the Shoton festival, held August 6 to 14 in Lhasa. There were large numbers of uniformed and plainclothes police monitoring crowds of worshippers. Officials delivered speeches at the festival denouncing the Dalai Lama and urging attendees to be loyal to the CCP.

In October, the U.S.-based news outlet *The Hill* reported that authorities continued to block or otherwise prevent Tibetans from accessing Jokhang Temple in Lhasa in order to expand access for Han Chinese tourists. RFA reported that beginning on May 18, authorities allowed worshippers to enter the temple from 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., while tourists, coming mainly from other parts of the country, could visit from 12:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. RFA reported on October 25 that authorities cited COVID-19 protocols to severely restrict government employees, students, retired state workers, and pilgrims from accessing Potala Palace (the former residence of the Dalai Lama) but allowed Han Chinese tourists to visit if they showed proof of negative COVID-19 test results.

In August, the government again banned the annual Dechen Shedrub prayer festival at the site of the former Larung Gar Tibetan Buddhist Institute from occurring. Authorities cited overcrowding and COVID-19 concerns as reasons for the ban. The ban marked the sixth consecutive year the government prohibited the 23-year-old festival from taking place.

According to local sources, Sichuan, Qinghai, and Gansu provincial authorities again warned major monasteries in Tibetan areas, including Labrang, Amchok, and Bora Monasteries, that those holding special events or celebrations would face unspecified "severe consequences."

Local authorities continued to invoke regulations concerning safeguarding national unity and responding to "religious extremism" in order to monitor individuals, groups, and institutions, and to punish adherents of religious leaders, such as the Dalai Lama. In March, ICT released a report entitled *Party Above Buddhism: China's Surveillance and Control of Tibetan Monasteries and Nunneries*. ICT stated the surveillance and control of the monastic community was carried out

through a sophisticated network of both human and electronic means. According to the report, “The methods deployed on the monastic community are of dystopian proportions and aim at its political neutralization. Not only are physical activities surveilled and controlled, but the institutional method attempts also to stifle the inner world of the monastic community through ideological control.” The report stated, “The intensive surveillance and control of the monastic community has led to either the expulsion of monks for not complying with the official policies, or to their voluntary departure due to constant harassment by officials creating an unbearably suffocating environment for them.”

Sources reported party leaders and branches of the UFWD, SARA, and the state-sanctioned BAC continued to station party and government officials, including security agents, in monasteries in Tibetan areas. Provincial, prefectural, county, and local governments continued to establish police stations or security offices adjacent to or on the premises of many monasteries and nunneries. While no updated statistics were available, sources estimated that in 2018, more than 15,000 government employees were working in approximately 3,000 Tibetan monasteries.

According to human rights groups and local sources, authorities continued to install overt camera surveillance systems at monasteries. The ICT report *Party Above Buddhism* stated CCTV cameras were “massively deployed for surveillance of the monasteries within and outside their vicinities. It is the single largest convenient tool used by law enforcement agencies to maintain surveillance of the monastic community, retain a cumulative record, and proactively crush any hint of dissent... The presence of ever-watching cameras within the monasteries produces a suffocating environment for the monastic community.” The report contained a photograph of the surveillance control room at Kirti Monastery in Ngaba Prefecture, Sichuan Province, showing monitors linked to 35 separate cameras surrounding the monastery. RFA reported in 2020 that authorities had opened “security centers,” or “convenience” police stations, throughout Lhasa. RFA described the security centers’ role as “subverting local indigenous populations through surveillance.”

According to multiple sources in the TAR and in other Tibetan areas, officials continued to maintain a watch list of family members, relatives, and close friends of self-immolators to prevent them from meeting and communicating with international visitors, and, in some cases, deprived them of public benefits.

In March, RFA reported the PRC established 697 “Discipline Committees” across Tibet that included 1,960 “inspectors” assigned to surveil inhabitants in towns and

rural areas. A source told RFA, “Any Tibetans traveling there from outside these regions have to show a document stamped with a travel permit.” RFA stated authorities maintained “tight controls over information flows in the region, arresting Tibetans for sharing news and opinions on social media and for contacting relatives living in exile.”

VOA reported in March that authorities continued to monitor and ban the use of social media apps and virtual private networks in Tibet. Sources stated security officials searched the phones of Tibetans and often threatened to cut off basic social services if they remained in contact with their relatives in India or elsewhere abroad. In its report *Party Above Buddhism*, ICT stated surveillance of internet and social media activities of monks had “deeply affected the monastic community, as they are at the forefront of resistance against the Communist Party of China’s atrocities in Tibet... Monks have faced arrest for messages deemed ‘illegal’ for sharing images of the Dalai Lama or talk about the state of the Tibetan language.”

RFA reported in November that authorities issued government mobile phones to Tibetan former prisoners, particularly political prisoners, as a means of further monitoring their movements. One former prisoner told RFA, “Cell phones issued by the government have tracking devices installed in them that note your location and who you are meeting. The SIM card used in these phones is directly linked to a government control office[.]” TCHRD reported authorities forced some Tibetan former prisoners in Qinghai Province to wear ankle bracelets that monitored movements, recorded conversations, and set off alarms when the person crossed set boundaries or attempted to tamper with the bracelet.

Human rights groups stated authorities continued to use the “Regulations on the Establishment of a Model Area for Ethnic Unity and Progress in the Tibet Autonomous Region,” adopted in January 2020, to further impose central government control and Han culture on the Tibetan population and to encourage Tibetans to become informants on each other. As part of the government’s January “Regulations on Counter-espionage Security of the Tibet Autonomous Region,” authorities deployed what ICT characterized as “deceptive language” to persuade Tibetans that their neighbors and foreigners were a threat to national security. According to ICT, “Pressure on individual Tibetans to report on their neighbors is intensified by the widespread use of surveillance technologies. If cameras and facial recognition algorithms pick up activity deemed suspicious, those who witnessed it, yet failed to report it, also fall under suspicion, and may face interrogation at length.”

A Jamestown Foundation 2020 report, *Xinjiang's System of Militarized Vocational Training Comes to Tibet*, stated that the government employed “grid management” and a “double-linked household” system to surveil and control communities. Under a grid management system, neighborhoods and communities were divided into smaller units with administrative and security staff who maintained detailed databases on everyone living in that grid. The system “corrals regular citizens into the state’s extensive surveillance apparatus by making sets of 10 ‘double-linked’ households report on each other.” Tibet.net reported in March that authorities rewarded individuals with money and other forms of compensation for reporting on neighbors who were “extremist” or “splittist.” The maximum reward for information leading to the arrests of social media users deemed disloyal to the government was 300,000 renminbi (\$47,100), six times the average per capita GDP in the TAR, according to local media.

According to human rights groups and media sources, authorities frequently checked mobile phones for pictures of the Dalai Lama and other content that was considered sensitive. There were reports that authorities surveilled ordinary Tibetans for years after finding such material.

In its report *Party Above Buddhism*, ICT stated monks and nuns were “also under constant pressure to change their ideological underpinnings, which are based on Buddhist philosophy. The authorities require the monks and nuns to ‘correct’ their thoughts by checking themselves and criticizing each other.” ICT published photographs of monks studying CCP ideology. The report stated, “The active presence of police forces the monastics to constantly ask themselves whether anything they do could be considered illegal.”

Sources stated authorities forced monasteries to display portraits of CCP leaders and the national flag.

Human rights groups and local sources reported that during the year, authorities continued to expand the requirement that families replace images of the Dalai Lama and other lamas in their homes with portraits of preeminent CCP leaders, including Chairman Mao and President Xi. Previously, this policy was only compulsory for families that were dependent on state support under the poverty alleviation program. According to local sources, authorities required all monasteries, schools, and offices in the TAR and Tibetan areas to display pictures of CCP leaders. Sources said authorities conducted inspections to check for compliance.

In addition to the prohibition on the open veneration of the Dalai Lama, including the display of his photograph, the government continued to ban pictures of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, whom the Dalai Lama and nearly all Tibetan Buddhists recognize as the 11th Panchen Lama. In some counties of the TAR, punishments for displaying images of the Dalai Lama included expulsion from monasteries. Local sources told RFA that officials from government bureaus monitoring religious practice visited Tibetan schools and warned teachers and students not to keep or display photographs of the Dalai Lama.

Local sources reported that “The 20 Prohibitions” were still in force. These regulations, instituted in the TAR in 2019, forbade monks from using social media to “incite subversion, defame or insult others, assist extremist religious groups, provide undisclosed information of the state to domestic or foreign individuals or organizations, or receive or release illegal information.” TAR government offices also announced that those who misused social media could be imprisoned for up to eight years.

Authorities increased the surveillance of, and efforts to restrict, access to WeChat and other social media. TCHRD reported that on August 4, the CCP’s Central Propaganda Department, in conjunction with nine other party and government departments and agencies, held a video conference launching a campaign to crack down on “illegal” online activities. The other participants were the Central Cyberspace Administration, Supreme People’s Court, Supreme People’s Procuratorate, Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, Ministry of Public Security, State Administration of Taxation, State Administration for Market Regulation, State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television, and the All-China Association of Journalists. Within a week of the campaign’s announcement, Tibetan diaspora sources reported Tibetans were detained following random searches of personal phones and contents posted on WeChat.

RFA reported that on July 20, police in Ngaba County, Sichuan Province arrested Konmey, the head of the discipline committee at Ngaba’s Trotsik Monastery, on suspicion of holding politically sensitive discussions on WeChat. According to a local source, Konmey was arrested solely because he recited prayers on WeChat. The source stated, “He said nothing at all about political issues.”

Free Tibet reported in January that PRC authorities in Nagchu Prefecture, TAR, replaced a Tibetan mantra, “The Jewel is the Lotus,” which was written in Tibetan on a hillside in letters large enough to be seen from planes landing at Nagchu

Dagring Airport, with an image of China's flag and the slogan, "Long Live the Motherland," in Mandarin. Accompanying the article were before-and-after aerial photographs showing where the mantra had been and what had replaced it. Free Tibet stated the Tibetan mantra had once been ubiquitous throughout Tibet, but authorities were methodically replacing the phrase throughout the region.

Free Tibet reported that in late October, authorities in Drago (Luhuo) County, Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province ordered Drago Monastery officials to demolish the monastery's Gaden Rabten Namgyal Ling school, saying the buildings violated local land-use laws. The school trained young monks in Tibetan language and grammar, Mandarin, English, and Madhyamaka and other Buddhist doctrines. Authorities ordered 130 students attending the school to return to their homes.

RFA reported that on December 12, authorities in Drago County, Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province, destroyed a 30-meter (99-foot) tall statue of the Buddha. Authorities said the statue, which was built in 2015, was constructed without county authorization. They also burned prayer flags and destroyed prayer wheels around the statue. RFA later reported that authorities took four individuals from the Gaden Namgyal Ling Monastery in Drago into custody days before the statue's demolition, including the abbot, his assistant, and two monks.

Multiple sources reported the government continued to interfere in the religious education of laypersons and children. Authorities in the TAR required monks to cancel all classes with children, warning that monks and parents could have their social security benefits restricted or be detained if classes continued. The ban on religious education was also implemented in some places outside of the TAR.

The Tibet Action Institute (TAI) published a report in December that stated nearly 80 percent of all Tibetan school children – roughly 800,000 students – were forced to attend state-run boarding schools. According to the report, the government maintained "a vast network of colonial boarding schools in Tibet where students live separated from their families and subjected to highly politicized education, primarily in Chinese." The report concluded that these schools were "the cornerstone of an assimilationist agenda advanced by Chinese President Xi Jinping himself, intended to preempt threats to Chinese Communist Party control by eliminating ethnic differences." The TAI report outlined government efforts to "remold" Tibetan youth through a system of education that eliminated "all but token elements of their 'Tibetanness.'" The report stated the boarding school system was at the heart of the CCP's effort to subsume Tibetans into Chinese culture and identity.

The TAI report stated that due to the government’s efforts over the last decade to eliminate monasteries as an option for Tibetan education, Tibetan parents were “compelled by a lack of viable alternatives to send their children to boarding schools.” The TAI report also presented evidence that the government used fines and threats to coerce parents into sending their children to state-run boarding schools. The TAI report indicated that Tibetan parents had concluded that sending their children to these schools was the only way for the children to “survive in their profoundly changing world.”

ICT reported in March that TAR regulations required schools to incorporate national security programming and counterespionage “security knowledge” into the curriculum for school children, in accordance with national regulations that called for school curriculums to ensure students “adhered to the correct path” by “strengthening the party’s leadership, enhancing political ideology, and practicing core socialist values.”

Local sources reported that during the year, provincial officials in the TAR and other Tibetan areas again banned all underage students from participating in religious activities during school holidays. School officials again required students to sign an agreement stating they would not participate in any form of religious activity during the summer.

RFA reported that beginning in April, schools in Nagchu Prefecture, TAR posted regulations prohibiting parents of schoolchildren from carrying rosaries, prayer wheels, or other religious items on school grounds. A source told RFA the new regulations stated that “schools are places to cultivate and produce socialist scholars and should not be used as places in which to follow rituals and traditions.” The source said authorities were “stepping up their efforts to spread the party’s ideology in Tibetan counties, towns, monasteries, and schools” in advance of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the CCP.

According to RFA, local sources expressed concern that restrictions on the use of the Tibetan language in Tibetan schools, where preference was given to instruction in Mandarin, were causing Tibetan children to lose fluency in their own language. Authorities also suppressed informally organized language courses in monasteries and towns, which they labeled illegal associations, and subjected teachers to detention and arrest.

The government continued to maintain that Gyaltzen Norbu, whom it selected in 1995, was the Panchen Lama's true reincarnation, and not Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, whom authorities had disappeared that same year. Norbu remained the vice president of, and highest-ranking Tibetan in, the government-affiliated BAC. According to numerous Tibetan Buddhist monks and scholars, the SARA and provincial religious affairs bureau officials frequently pressured monks and laypersons, including government officials, to attend religious study sessions presided over by Norbu.

In accordance with official guidelines for monastery management, leadership of and membership in committees and working groups remained restricted to individuals the guidelines described as “politically reliable, patriotic, and devoted monks, nuns, and party and government officials.” General administrative affairs in TAR monasteries, which monks traditionally managed, continued instead to be overseen by monastery management committees and monastic government working groups, both of which were composed primarily of government officials and CCP members, in addition to a few government-approved monks. Since 2011, the government had established such groups in all monasteries in the TAR and in many major monasteries in other Tibetan areas.

In its report *Party Above Buddhism*, ICT reported multiple CCP and government bureaus were involved in the “social management” of monasteries. According to ICT, “24 Party and government entities maintain control of monasteries in Ngaba (Aba) Prefecture as per article 4 of the ‘Notice of the People’s Government of Ngaba Prefecture on Issuing the Interim Measures for the Administration of Tibetan Buddhist Affairs in Ngaba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture’ issued in 2009.”

The traditional monastic system reportedly continued to decline as many senior Buddhist teachers from Tibet remained or died in India or elsewhere abroad. The heads of most major schools of Tibetan Buddhism – including the Dalai Lama, Karmapa, Sakya Trizin, and Khatok Getse Rinpoche, as well as Bon leader Kyabje Menr Trizin – all continued to reside abroad. The government also banned India-trained Tibetan monks, most of whom received their education from the Dalai Lama or those with ties to him, from teaching in Tibetan monasteries in China, although there were reportedly rare exceptions made for progovernment monks.

As in previous years, senior monks at some monasteries continued to report informal agreements with local officials whereby resident monks would not stage protests or commit self-immolations as long as the government adopted a hands-off

approach to the management of their monasteries. Sources said authorities monitored all financial transactions involving monasteries inside Tibet and entities abroad.

According to media and NGO reports, the CCP maintained a list of state-approved “living buddhas.” Such individuals reportedly continued to undergo training on patriotism and the CCP’s socialist political system. In 2018, the BAC announced its database contained 1,311 “living buddhas” that it deemed “authentic.” The Dalai Lama was reportedly not on the list. This database reportedly overlapped with the newly established database required by the “Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy,” which also included monks who were not “living buddhas.”

According to sources, every individual on the official reincarnation database received political training in state ideology, entirely separate from religious training, that emphasized that their career and role in the religious community depended on motivating religious believers “to love the party, love the country and social stability maintenance work, as well as fight against ‘separatism’ and the Dalai Lama.” One source said, “This means that now the Tibetan reincarnations are becoming Communist-trained talents rather than religious leaders.” Religious leaders continued to report that authorities incentivized lamas and monks to leave monastic life voluntarily by emphasizing the attributes of secular life, as compared to the more disciplined and austere religious life. Monastery leaders cited continued revisions to education policies, religion regulations, and government control of monastery management as reasons for the declining number of young monks. Religious leaders and scholars continued to say these and other means of interference continued to cause them concern about the ability of religious traditions to survive for successive generations.

In December, HRW reported an unnamed senior Party official visited three townships in Sog County, TAR, in November “to ensure local Tibetan officials endorse government policies on the recognition of Tibetan Buddhist incarnations.” According to state-run media, more than 120 township officials, staff of monastery management committees, village-based cadres, village officials, local police, and schoolteachers attended sessions with the official at which they “unanimously declared their willingness to follow laws and regulations concerning Tibetan Buddhist incarnation affairs.”

Sources said the state required monks and nuns to demonstrate – in addition to competence in religious studies – “political reliability,” “moral integrity capable of impressing the public,” and willingness to “play an active role at critical

moments.” Since the policy’s inception in 2018, many major monasteries and religious institutes implemented political training programs. The ICT report *Party Above Buddhism* contained numerous examples of monks and nuns viewing CCP propaganda materials and studying the “Four Standards for Monks and Nuns,” which included compliance with “the standard on political reliability.” According to the ICT, the four standards policy “in essence requires the monastic community to be loyal to the Communist Party of China and embrace socialism with Chinese characteristics.”

According to media reports, authorities continued “patriotic reeducation” campaigns at many monasteries and nunneries across Tibetan areas. All monks and nuns were required to participate in several sessions of “legal education” per year, during which they were required to denounce the Dalai Lama, express allegiance to the government-recognized Panchen Lama, study President Xi’s speeches, learn Mandarin, and hear lectures praising the leadership of the CCP and the socialist system.

According to multiple government media sources, the PRC conducted a series of training sessions for Tibetan Buddhist clergy during the year. In September, the UFWD hosted a seven-day training session for clergy across the TAR that included “patriotic films” and “theoretical political education” and focused on the clergy’s role in upholding principles of the CCP. The curriculum included studying the National Security Law and speeches by President Xi.

Media reported that in April, the UFWD hosted a five-day training session for 40 Tibetan nuns in the TAR that focused on advocating “love of country,” “maintaining national unity,” and following the CCP.

Authorities continued to ban minors younger than 18 from participating in monastic training. Multiple sources reported authorities forced underage monks and nuns to leave their monasteries and Buddhist schools to receive “patriotic education.” Journalists reported police arrested, and in some cases beat, some underage monks who refused to cooperate, and that parents and other family members were also threatened with loss of social benefits if underage monks did not comply.

Government officials regularly denigrated the Dalai Lama publicly and accused the “Dalai clique” and other “outside forces” of instigating Tibetan protests, stating such acts were attempts to “split” China. Throughout the year, then TAR Communist Party Secretary Wu Yingjie publicly criticized the Dalai Lama’s

“clique” and called on party cadres to eliminate the negative influence the Dalai Lama had on religion. The *Economist* reported that Wu publicly replied to a letter purportedly written by a Tibetan herder in February, calling for him to share the message that Tibetans must “reduce religious consumption” and eliminate the Dalai Lama’s “negative influence.”

RFA reported on March 11, the government-recognized Panchen Lama, Gyaltsen Norbu, in his capacity as a member of the Chinese People’s Consultative Congress, told the congress, “Foreign anti-China forces have been hyping Tibet issues and religious issues in China, and transforming the topics into political bargaining chips.”

State-run media reported that during President Xi’s visit to Qinghai Province in July, he called on Tibetans to “resolutely implement the decisions and deployments of the CCP Central Committee” and strive to “write the Qinghai chapter of building a modern socialist country in an all-round way.” Xi also visited the TAR on July 21-22, where he urged Tibetans to “follow the party.” According to the state-run media outlet *Xinhua*, Xi instructed local provincial officials to work toward making people in Tibet identify more with the “great motherland, Chinese people, Chinese culture, the Chinese Communist Party, and socialism with Chinese characteristics.”

The Chinese internet company Baidu reported that Wang Yang, chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, delivered a speech in Tibet in August in which he said, “Over the past 70 years, Tibetan ethnic unity has shown historic progress. We adhere to the correct path of solving ethnic problems with Chinese characteristics, eliminate ethnic discrimination and ethnic estrangement in the old society, defeat the separatist and sabotage activities of the Dalai clique and foreign hostile forces, and promote the unity and struggle of all ethnic groups for common prosperity and development.”

Authorities continued to justify in state media their interference with Tibetan Buddhist monasteries by associating the monasteries with “separatism” and pro-independence activities.

During the year, there were no reports that the Boundary Management System Agreement signed by the PRC and the government of Nepal in 2019 had been used to return long-staying Tibetan refugees to the PRC from Nepal. Tibetan advocacy groups had stated when the agreement was signed that the provision requiring both countries to hand over citizens who illegally crossed the Nepal-China border was

potentially in conflict with Nepal's international commitments under the Convention Against Torture and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as a "gentlemen's agreement" with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees that provides for Tibetan refugees in Nepal's custody to transit to India.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, most individuals were unable to travel abroad during the year, including for religious purposes. In past years, individuals seeking to travel for religious purposes reported continued difficulties traveling to India for religious training, meetings with religious leaders, or to visit family members living in monasteries. In many cases, Public Security Bureau officials refused to approve their passport applications. In other cases, prospective travelers were able to obtain passports only after paying bribes to local officials. Some individuals seeking to travel said they could only obtain passports after promising not to travel to India or not to criticize government policies in Tibetan areas while overseas. In some cases, family members were required to sign a guarantee that passport applicants would return from their travel. According to local sources, numerous Tibetans in Gansu, Qinghai, and Sichuan Provinces waited up to 10 years to receive a passport, often without any explanation for the delay. There were also instances of authorities confiscating and canceling previously issued passports, reportedly as a way of preventing Tibetans from participating in religious events in India involving the Dalai Lama.

Tibetans who traveled to Nepal and planned to continue to India reported that PRC officials visited their families' homes in Tibet and threatened their relatives if they did not return immediately. Sichuan Province and TAR officials continued to require religious travelers returning from India to attend political training sessions. According to sources, these restrictions had prevented thousands of Tibetans from attending religious training in India.

Restrictions remained in place for monks and nuns living abroad, particularly those in India, which made it difficult or impossible for them to travel into Tibetan areas.

Tibetans who returned from India reported facing difficulties finding employment or receiving religious or secular education. Returning Tibetans were not allowed to study at Chinese monasteries, and most were denied admission to secular schools because they did not have education certificates recognized by the government. Local sources said some Tibetans were subject to additional government scrutiny as a result of having relatives at religious institutions in India.

According to sources, authorities in some areas continued to enforce special restrictions on Tibetans staying at hotels inside and outside the TAR. Police regulations forbade some hotels and guesthouses in the TAR from accepting Tibetan guests, particularly monks and nuns, and they required other hotels to notify police departments when Tibetan guests checked in.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

Tibetans, particularly those who wore traditional and religious attire, regularly reported being denied hotel rooms, refused service by taxi drivers, and discriminated against in employment and in business transactions.

Many Han Buddhists continued to demonstrate interest in Tibetan Buddhism and donated money to Tibetan monasteries and nunneries, according to local sources in such monasteries and nunneries. Tibetan Buddhist monks frequently visited Chinese cities to provide religious instruction to Han Buddhists. In addition, a growing number of Han Buddhists visited Tibetan monasteries, although officials sometimes imposed restrictions that made it difficult for Han Buddhists to conduct long-term study at many monasteries in Tibetan areas. State propaganda reported on these activities.

Media and NGOs reported that monasteries collected donations to purchase and distribute personal protective equipment to local residents and populations in other parts of China during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

The PRC continued to tightly restrict diplomatic access to the TAR and to deny the U.S. embassy in Beijing requests to visit the area. No U.S. diplomats were allowed to visit the TAR during the year.

U.S. officials repeatedly raised concerns about religious freedom in Tibet with Chinese government counterparts at multiple levels. U.S. officials, including the Secretary of State, the Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, who was appointed in December, the Charge d' Affaires, and other Department of State and embassy officials continued sustained and concerted efforts to advocate for the rights of Tibetans to preserve, practice, teach, and develop their religious traditions and language without interference from the government. The Charge d' Affaires and other U.S. embassy officials regularly expressed concerns to the Chinese government at senior levels, including central government and provincial leaders,

regarding severe restrictions imposed on Tibetans' ability to exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including religious freedom and cultural rights. The Charge d'Affaires pressed senior PRC officials on the government's refusal to engage in dialogue with the Dalai Lama. U.S. officials continued to underscore that only the Dalai Lama and other faith leaders could decide the succession of the Dalai Lama, and they also raised concerns about the disappearance of the Panchen Lama. In addition to raising systemic issues, such as impediments to passport issuance to Tibetans, U.S. officials expressed concern and sought further information about individual cases and incidents of religious persecution and discrimination, and they sought increased access to the TAR for U.S. officials, journalists, and tourists, including for religious pilgrims and those traveling for other religious purposes.

During the year, the U.S. government used a variety of diplomatic tools to promote religious freedom and accountability in Tibet, including continuing visa restrictions on PRC government and CCP officials that the U.S. government had determined to be "substantially involved in the formulation or execution of policies related to access for foreigners to Tibetan areas," pursuant to the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act of 2018.

In July, the U.S. Secretary of State met with Central Tibetan Administration representative Ngodup Dongchung in New Delhi.

On March 9, the State Department spokesperson stated, "We believe that the Chinese Government should have no role in the succession process of the Dalai Lama. Beijing's interference in the succession of the Panchen Lama more than 25 years ago, including by 'disappearing' the Panchen Lama as a child and attempting to replace him with a PRC government-chosen successor – it remains an outrageous abuse of religious freedom." On April 22, speaking on the disappearance of the 11th Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the Department of State spokesperson said in a statement, "We respect Tibetans' right to select, educate, and venerate their own leaders, like the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, according to their own beliefs, and without government interference. We call on the [PRC] government to immediately make public the Tibetan-venerated Panchen Lama's whereabouts and to give us the opportunity to meet with him in person."

In January, the then U.S. Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues met virtually with the Dalai Lama. According to RFA, the Dalai Lama "stressed the importance of preserving Tibet's Buddhist religion[.]"

On June 22, the United States joined a group of 44 countries in issuing a Canada-led joint statement expressing grave concern about the human rights situation in Xinjiang, as well as deep concern about the deterioration of fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong and the human rights situation in Tibet.

On December 20, the Secretary of State selected the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights to serve concurrently as the new U.S. Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues. In his announcement, the Secretary said the Special Coordinator would continue to “promote respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Tibetans, including their freedom of religion or belief[.]”

Although U.S. officials were denied access to the TAR during the year, they maintained contact with a wide range of religious leaders and practitioners, as well as NGOs in other Tibetan areas, to monitor the status of religious freedom.

The embassy and consulates used social media to deliver direct messaging about religious freedom in Tibet to millions of Chinese citizens. In March, the embassy posted the Secretary of State’s remarks to PRC State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, noting that the Secretary “raised concerns about a range of PRC actions that undermined the international rules-based order and that run counter to our values and interests and those of our partners, including actions related to human rights, Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, the East and South China Seas, and Taiwan.” Following the U.S. President’s November virtual meeting with President Xi, the embassy posted on WeChat and Weibo, “President Biden raised concerns about the PRC’s practices in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong, as well as human rights more broadly.”

## XINJIANG 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

### Executive Summary

The constitution of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), which cites the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), states that citizens “enjoy freedom of religious belief” but limits protections for religious practice to “normal religious activities,” without defining “normal.” The U.S. government estimated that since April 2017, the government has detained more than one million Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, Hui, and members of other Muslim groups, as well as some Christians, in specially built internment camps or converted detention facilities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) under the national counterterrorism law and the regional counterextremism policy. Some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and academics estimated the number of individuals detained in internment camps or other facilities was higher. According to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute’s (ASPI) analysis of satellite imagery data, the government built or expanded 385 detention centers between 2017 and 2021, including at least 61 between July 2019 and July 2020 and five built during the year. Human rights NGOs and former detainees said authorities subjected individuals to forced disappearance, torture, other physical and psychological abuse, including forced sterilization and sexual abuse, forced labor, political indoctrination, and prolonged detention without trial because of their religion and ethnicity. There were reports that authorities moved tens of thousands of individuals from their home areas to work elsewhere in the region and the country. During the year, multiple organizations found the government’s widespread and systematic physical abuses targeting Uyghurs amounted to crimes against humanity and its actions suppressing the group’s regenerative capacity amounted to genocide under the 1948 Genocide Convention. A legal opinion by a group of British barristers stated there was a “plausible inference” that President Xi Jinping, Zhu Hailun, Deputy Secretary of the Xinjiang People’s Congress, and Chen Quanguo, XUAR Party Secretary since 2016, each possessed “the necessary intent to destroy the Uyghurs as a group, so as to support a case against them of genocide.” The government continued to cite what it called the “three evils” of “ethnic separatism, religious extremism, and violent terrorism” as justification for enacting and enforcing restrictions on religious practices of Muslims and members of non-Muslim religious minority groups. In May and September, the CCP adopted Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy and Administrative Measures for Religious Schools, respectively. These measures placed greater scrutiny and rules on clergy and religious schools to uphold CCP ideological principles. The whereabouts of hundreds of prominent Uyghur intellectuals,

religious scholars, cultural figures, doctors, journalists, artists, academics, and other professionals, in addition to many other citizens the government arrested or detained, remained unknown. There were reports of individuals dying of injuries sustained during interrogations, medical neglect, and torture. According to PRC government documents, eyewitness accounts, and victims' statements, the government continued to use family separation, forced sterilization, involuntary birth control, and abortion to reduce the birthrate among Muslims. Authorities continued to implement a variety of different methods, including home inspections, to ensure families were not observing religious practices such as praying, and it banned certain groups from observing Ramadan. According to government sources and eyewitness accounts, the government encouraged – and in some cases required – neighbors to spy on each other. Other surveillance included behavioral profiling and forcing Uyghurs to accept government officials and CCP members living in their homes. Government documents revealed extensive use of surveillance cameras and security checkpoints in public spaces, including religious venues, as well as telephone, online, and financial surveillance. In December, the “Uyghur Tribunal,” an international group of attorneys, academics, and NGO representatives, stated surveillance was so pervasive, “parts of Xinjiang have become, to some of those ethnic minorities, an open-air prison.” Based on satellite imagery and other sources, researchers estimated authorities had destroyed, damaged, or desecrated approximately 16,000 mosques in the region (65 percent of the total), and demolished a further 30 percent of important Islamic sacred sites. Research conducted in 2020 estimated nearly 900,000 children, including some preschool-aged children, were separated from their families and living in boarding schools or orphanages, where they studied ethnic Han culture, Mandarin, and CCP ideology. In November, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) issued a report stating the goal of these schools was to erase Uyghur cultural and religious practice from the younger generation. International media reported that in September, state media announced the launch of the “Pomegranate Flower” program, which assigned Han children from across the country as “relatives” to maintain contact with Uyghur toddlers and young children, in what activists and analysts said was a further effort to assimilate Uyghur children and eliminate their language and culture. Textbooks in the Xinjiang Islamic Institute, which trains imams, emphasized the need to “be grateful to the Party” and build a socialist Xinjiang. The government continued to seek to forcibly repatriate Uyghur and other Muslim citizens from overseas and detained some of those who returned. The government harassed and threatened Uyghurs living abroad.

Unequal treatment in society of Uyghur Muslims and Han Chinese continued in parallel with authorities' suppression of Uyghur language, culture, and religious

practices while promoting the Han majority in political, economic, and cultural life. Muslims reported severe societal discrimination in employment and business opportunities, and in travel. A journalist who traveled to the region reported manifestations of Uyghur culture, such as song, dance, and clothing, were packaged as tourist items for visiting Han Chinese in what one Western scholar referred to as the “museumification” of Uyghur culture.

U.S. embassy officials met with national and regional government officials to advocate for the human rights of Uyghur Muslims and members of other Muslim and non-Muslim minority groups in Xinjiang. On January 19, the then Secretary of State publicly announced a determination that since at least March 2017, the government has committed crimes against humanity and genocide against Uyghurs, who are predominantly Muslim, and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang. On February 16 during a CNN townhall, the President said the United States would continue to speak out against human rights abuses China perpetrated against, among others, Uyghurs. During the year, the U.S. government used a variety of diplomatic and economic tools to promote religious freedom and accountability in Xinjiang, including sanctions, visa restrictions, controls on exports and imports, and an updated business advisory raising awareness among U.S.-based companies about the risks of doing business in the region. On June 22, the United States joined a group of 44 countries in issuing a Canada-led joint statement condemning human rights abuses in Xinjiang, as well as the deterioration of fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong and the human rights situation in Tibet. On October 21, the United States joined a group of 43 countries in issuing a France-led joint statement condemning human rights abuses in Xinjiang. The embassy and consulates general delivered direct messages about religious freedom in Xinjiang through social media posts and promoted online engagement on the issue of religious freedom for Xinjiang’s ethnic minority Muslim populations.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

A June report on the XUAR issued by the Department of Population and Employment Statistics of the National Bureau of Statistics estimates the total population is 26 million. The report states Uyghurs, along with Kazakh, Hui, Kyrgyz, and members of other predominantly Muslim ethnic minority groups constitute approximately 15 million residents in Xinjiang, or approximately 58 percent of the total population. According to the report, of these, 12 million are Uyghurs. The largest segment of the remaining population is Han Chinese (11 million, approximately 42 percent), with additional groups including Mongols,

Tibetans, and others constituting less than 1 percent. Uyghurs are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslims. The *Globe and Mail* reported in September 2019 that according to sources in the region, Uyghur and Han Chinese Christians likely number in the thousands.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution, which cites the leadership of the CCP and the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong and Xi Jinping Thought, states that citizens “enjoy freedom of religious belief” but limits protections for religious practice to “normal religious activities,” without defining “normal.” The constitution also stipulates the right of citizens to believe in or not believe in any religion. The government recognizes five official religions – Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Roman Catholicism. Only religious groups belonging to one of five state-sanctioned “patriotic religious associations” (the Buddhist Association of China, the Chinese Taoist Association, the Islamic Association of China, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, and the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association) representing these religions are permitted to register with the government and legally hold worship services or other religious ceremonies and activities.

The Regulations on Religious Affairs require that religious activity “must not harm national security.” While the regulations stipulate religious groups must abide by the law, safeguard national unity, and respond to “religious extremism,” the term “extremism” is undefined. Measures to safeguard unity and respond to “religious extremism” include monitoring groups, individuals, and institutions, and recommending penalties such as suspending groups and canceling clergy credentials.

In addition to the national counterterrorism law, Xinjiang has its own counterterrorism and “de-extremification” laws that went into effect in 2016 and 2017, respectively, containing similar provisions to the national law regarding “religious extremism.” These laws ban wearing long beards, full-face coverings, and religious dress; expanding halal practice beyond food and daily prayer; and “interfering” with family planning, weddings, funerals, or inheritance, among other provisions. The law limits the information that may be released to the public following an incident the government defines as a terror attack.

Regional regulations passed in 2018 to implement the national counterterrorism law permit the establishment of “vocational skills education training centers” (which the government also calls “education centers” and “education and transformation establishments”) to “carry out antiextremist ideological education.” The regulations stipulate that “institutions such as vocational skill education training centers should carry out training sessions on the common national language, laws and regulations, and vocational skills, and carry out antiextremist ideological education, and psychological and behavioral correction to promote thought transformation of trainees and help them return to the society and family.”

CCP members and retired government officials, including Uyghurs, are required to be atheists and are forbidden from engaging in religious practices. CCP members who are found to belong to religious organizations are subject to various types of punishment, including termination of their employment and expulsion from the CCP.

Regulations in Xinjiang’s capital, Urumqi, prohibit veils that cover the face, homeschooling children, and “abnormal beards.” A separate regulation bans the practice of religion in government buildings and the wearing of clothes associated with “religious extremism.” Neither “abnormal” nor “religious extremism” are defined in law. Similar regulations are in effect in other parts of Xinjiang.

Authorities in the XUAR have defined 26 religious activities, including some practices of Islam, Christianity, and Tibetan Buddhism, as illegal without prior government authorization. Regional regulations stipulate no classes, scripture study groups, or religious studies courses may be offered by any group or institution without prior government approval. No religious group may carry out any religious activities, including preaching, missionary work, proselytizing, and ordaining clergy, without government approval. Regional regulations also ban editing, translation, publication, printing, reproduction, production, distribution, sale, and dissemination of religious publications and audiovisual products without authorization.

Xinjiang officials require minors to complete nine years of compulsory public education before they may receive religious education outside of school. Xinjiang regulations also forbid minors from participating in religious activities and impose penalties on organizations and individuals who “organize, entice, or force” minors to participate in religious activities. A regulation in effect since 2016 further bans any form of religious activity in Xinjiang schools and stipulates parents or guardians who “organize, lure, or force minors into religious activities” may be

stopped by anyone and reported to police. Xinjiang's regional version of the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency Law states children affected by ethnic separatism, extremism, and terrorism, and/or committing offenses that seriously endanger society but do not warrant a criminal punishment may be sent to "specialized schools for correction" at the request of their parents, guardians, or the school.

The State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) issued new regulations, effective May 1, entitled "Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy," that require all clergy to pledge allegiance to the PRC and socialism and that create a database of "religious personnel" to track their performance. Article 3 of the regulations states clergy "should love the motherland, support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, support the socialist system, abide by the constitution, laws, regulations, and rules, practice the core values of socialism, adhere to the principle of independent and self-administered religion in China, adhere to the direction of the Sinicization of religion in China, and operate to maintain national unity, religious harmony, and social stability." Article 6 states, in part, clergy should "resist illegal religious activities and religious extremist ideology, and resist infiltration by foreign forces using religion." Article 41 states "entrance to religious places of worship should be regulated through strict gatekeeping, verification of identity, and registration." The regulations also stipulate that authorities will hold religious organizations and institutions responsible for the behavior of individual religious clergy. Article 7 stipulates religious staff should "focus on improving their own quality, improving their cultural and moral literacy, studying the contents of doctrines and regulations that are conducive to social harmony, progress of the times, and health and civilization, and integrate [these values and practices] into preaching, and play a role in promoting the Sinicization of religion in our country."

In addition to these nationwide rules, XUAR regulations on the administration of religious affairs, revised in 2014, require clerics to "uphold the leadership of the CCP and the socialist system, safeguard the reunification of the motherland and ethnic unity, be patriotic and loyal, and have high prestige and religious knowledge."

The SARA also issued new regulations on September 1 requiring all religious schools to teach Xi Jinping Thought and adhere to the "Sinicization of religion."

The Islamic Association of China, managed by the SARA under the leadership of the United Front Work Department, passed regulations in 2019 regarding the

qualifications for Muslim clerics throughout the country. The national-level regulations require Muslim clerics to meet the following requirements: “uphold the leadership of the CCP; love Islam and serve Muslims; possess a degree or receive formal training in Islamic scriptural education; have graduated from junior high school or above, in addition to attaining competency in Arabic; and be at least 22 years old.”

To apply to become a cleric, applicants first need to submit an “Application Form for the Qualification of Islamic Clerics.” In addition, they must provide a certificate of education from an Islamic school, an education certificate from junior high school or above, and a physical examination certificate issued by a designated hospital (including items such as “mental history”). Applicants are also required to submit a household registration certificate and national identification card. The applicant must receive a letter of recommendation written by the Administration of Islamic Activity Sites where the applicant’s household registration is located and submit it to the Islamic Association of the province, autonomous region, or municipality after review and approval by the local Islamic Association.

On September 28, the Standing Committee of the 13th People’s Congress of XUAR adopted “Regulations of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region on the Construction of Public Safety,” effective on January 1, 2022. The regulations instruct authorities to “crack down” on “ethnic separatist forces, evil terrorist forces, religious extremist forces, and other illegal and criminal activities that endanger national security[.]” The regulations also call for “control[ing] illegal religious activities, illegal religious propaganda materials, and illegal religious network dissemination in accordance with the law, and continu[ing] to promote de-radicalization.” The regulations further state authorities will “carry out anti-cult or xie jiao [literally ‘heterodox teachings’] propaganda and education,” prevent and crack down on various “cult” organizations, and effectively educate and reform the individuals involved in “cults.” The regulations also call for full implementation across the entire XUAR of a grid system of social surveillance that had previously been used only in certain parts of the region.

### **Government Practices**

According to media and NGO reports, the central government and XUAR authorities continued to cite what they called the “three evils” of “ethnic separatism, religious extremism, and violent terrorism” as justification to enact and enforce restrictions on religious practices of Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, Hui, and

members of other Muslim and non-Muslim religious groups. Police raids and the government's restrictions on Islamic practices continued throughout the year.

On January 26, barristers Alison Macdonald, Jackie McArthur, Naomi Hart, and Lorraine Aboagye of the Essex Court Chambers published an opinion entitled *International Criminal Responsibility for Crimes against Humanity and Genocide against the Uyghur Population in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region* (the Essex Court Chambers Opinion). The opinion stated, "There is evidence of crimes against humanity being committed against the Uyghur population, within the meaning of Art. 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. First, there is sufficient evidence to conclude the existence of a widespread and systematic attack on the Uyghur population of the XUAR, within the meaning of Art. 7. Second, there is sufficient evidence to amount to an arguable case that, as part of that attack, the *actus reus* [physical elements of the crime] requirements for the following specific crimes against humanity have been fulfilled: (a) Enslavement... by the use of forced labour by former and current inmates of detention facilities. (b) Imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty... constituted by widescale deprivations of liberty of members of the Uyghur population held in detention facilities without charge or trial. (c) Torture... in detention facilities, including the use of 'tiger chairs' [immobilizing chairs] and sexual violence. (d) Rape... in detention facilities. (e) Enforced sterilization... of Uyghur women, as part of efforts to reduce the Uyghur population. (f) Persecution... ranging from the deprivation of liberty to sexual violence and enslavement, directed against persons on the basis that they are members of the Uyghur population and/or Muslim. (g) Enforced disappearance... of members of the Uyghur population."

The Essex Court Chambers Opinion stated, "We consider that there is evidence that the crime of genocide is currently being committed in XUAR. First, the Uyghur population of XUAR constitutes an ethnical group within the meaning of Art. 6 of the Rome Statute. Second, it is at least arguable on the available evidence that there is an intent to destroy, in whole or in part, the Uyghur population of XUAR as such. The evidence also demonstrates that the *acta rei* [physical elements of the crime] listed below are taking place in the context of a 'manifest pattern of similar conduct' directed against the Uyghur population. Third, in our view, there is sufficient evidence to amount to an arguable case that the *actus reus* requirements for the following specific crimes of genocide have been fulfilled, with respect to members of the Uyghur population: (a) Causing serious bodily or mental harm... to Uyghurs in detention, including acts of torture and forced sterilisations. (b) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group.

(c) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.” The opinion further stated there was a “plausible inference” that Xi Jinping; Zhu Hailun, Deputy Secretary of the Xinjiang People’s Congress; and Chen Quanguo, Party Secretary of XUAR since 2016, each “possesse[d] the necessary intent to destroy the Uyghurs as a group, so as to support a case against them of genocide.” The opinion also stated, “China is a tightly controlled single-party State. It is therefore highly unlikely that an attack on the scale of that which the evidence reveals, and especially systematic detention on such a scale, would be carried out by State authorities other than on the orders of senior State officials.”

In March, think tank Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy released a report entitled *The Uyghur Genocide: An Examination of China’s Breaches of the 1948 Genocide Convention*. The report examined whether China was committing genocide against Uyghurs as defined by Article 2 of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The report included contributions of more than 30 scholars and researchers and found that the PRC bears responsibility for committing genocide against Uyghurs. The report stated, “High-level officials gave orders to ‘round up everyone who should be rounded up,’ ‘wipe them out completely,’ ‘break their lineage, break their roots, break their connections and break their origins.’” The report stated the PRC also pursued a “dual systematic campaign of forcibly sterilizing Uyghur women of childbearing age and interning Uyghur men of child-bearing years, preventing the regenerative capacity of the group.”

On April 19, international NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a 53-page report entitled “*Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots*”: *China’s Crimes against Humanity Targeting Uyghurs and Other Turkic Muslims*, authored with assistance from Stanford Law School’s Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic. Based on research conducted by the authors, reports by human rights organizations, media, activist groups, and others, and internal CCP documents, the report found that “[s]ince at least 2014, the Chinese government has subjected Turkic Muslims to various crimes against humanity, including mass arbitrary detention, torture and deaths in detention, and enforced disappearances.”

In June, UK-based NGO Amnesty International released a 160-page report entitled “*Like We Were Enemies in a War*”: *China’s Mass Internment, Torture and Persecution of Muslims in Xinjiang*, documenting the accounts of more than 50 former detainees who experienced torture, violence, and other mistreatment in detention camps. The report detailed the government’s systematic use of detention and “re-education” centers to target Uyghurs and members of other ethnic minority

groups living in Xinjiang. The report concluded “members of the predominately Muslim ethnic minorities in Xinjiang have been subjected to an attack meeting all the contextual elements of crimes against humanity,” and that the evidence demonstrated the PRC government had at least committed the crimes against humanity of “imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law; torture; and persecution.” The report also stated security officials’ use of rape and sexual violence constituted a crime against humanity as defined by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 7(1)(g) “Rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilizations, and other forms of sexual violence of comparable gravity.”

In November, the USHMM Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide released a 60-page report entitled “*To Make Us Slowly Disappear*”: *The Chinese Government’s Assault on the Uyghurs*. The report stated the USHMM was “gravely concerned that the Chinese government may be committing genocide against the Uyghurs.” It further built on the USHMM’s March 2020 announcement that “there was a reasonable basis to believe that the CCP had perpetrated the crimes against humanity of persecution and of imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty against Uyghurs.” USHMM stated, “This report analyzes additional information available in English in the public domain concerning the treatment of China’s Uyghur community in Xinjiang, and finds there is now a reasonable basis to believe that the crimes against humanity of forced sterilization, sexual violence, enslavement, torture, and forcible transfer are also being committed.”

On December 9, the “Uyghur Tribunal,” an international group of attorneys, academics, and NGO representatives, released its “Summary Judgment.” Based on the tribunal’s research and investigation, including the use of eyewitness testimonies, it concluded “in Xinjiang and at the hands of some part or parts of the PRC government and the CCP: (a) Hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs – with some estimates well in excess of a million – have been detained by PRC authorities without any, or any remotely sufficient reason, and subjected to acts of unconscionable cruelty, depravity and inhumanity. Sometimes up to 50 have been detained in a cell of 22 square metres [240 square feet] so that it was not possible for all to lie on concrete (or similar) floors, with buckets for toilets to be used in view of all in the cell, observed at every moment by CCTV. (b) Many of those detained have been tortured for no reason, by such methods as: pulling off fingernails; beating with sticks; detaining in ‘tiger chairs’ where feet and hands were locked in position for hours or days without break; confined in containers up

to the neck in cold water; and detained in cages so small that standing or lying was impossible. (c) Many of those detained have been shackled by heavy metal weights at their feet and sometimes with feet and hands connected, immobilised for months on end. (d) Detained women – and men – have been raped and subjected to extreme sexual violence. One young woman of twenty or twenty-one was gang raped by policemen in front of an audience of a hundred people all forced to watch. (e) Women detainees have had their vaginas and rectums penetrated by electric shock rods and iron bars. Women were raped by men paying to be allowed into the detention centre for the purpose. (f) Detainees were fed with food barely sufficient to sustain life and frequently insufficient to sustain health, food that could be withheld at whim to punish or humiliate. (g) Detainees were subjected to solitary confinement in cells permanently dark or permanently lit, deprived of sleep for days at a time and ritually humiliated.”

According to multiple human rights NGOs and academic sources, authorities held more than one million Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, Hui, and members of other Muslim groups as well as some Christians, in a vast network of camps since 2017, many of them co-located with factories, where sources said detainees were subjected to forced labor and “reeducation.” Several human rights groups estimated the number of individuals interned to be up to 3.5 million. The government continued to use detentions to implement a XUAR-specific counterextremism policy that identifies “extremist” behavior (including growing beards, wearing headscarves, and abstaining from alcohol) in concert with the National Counterterrorism Law, which contains provisions on “religious extremism.”

In September, the Jamestown Foundation released academic research providing evidence that the PRC’s top government officials were closely involved in the creation of the internment camp system in Xinjiang. The research, based on an examination of government documents and state-run media commentary, found that the “XUAR De-Extremification Regulation” was spearheaded by three government bodies: the Central Committee Xinjiang Work Coordination Small Group, the Legislative Affairs Commission of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress in Beijing, and the SARA. Two of the three institutions were under the direct supervision of Li Zhanshu and Wang Yang, members of the CCP’s seven-person Politburo Standing Committee, the CCP’s highest-ranking body.

Researchers at ASPI’s International Cyber Policy Centre continued to maintain the Xinjiang Data Project, an online database that uses satellite imagery, PRC

government documents, official statistics, and other sources to document human rights abuses in the region. The project locates, maps, and analyzes suspected detention facilities. According to the data, the government built or expanded 385 detention centers between 2017 and 2021, including at least 61 facilities built or expanded between July 2019 and July 2020 and five built during the year. Based on satellite imagery analysis of security features including high perimeter walls, watchtowers, internal fencing, and other features and usage patterns, analysts concluded 109 were low security facilities, 94 were medium security facilities, 72 were high security facilities, and 110 were maximum security facilities.

In July, *BuzzFeed News* published an analysis of the scale of the detention centers in Xinjiang and concluded that “China has built space to lock up at least 1.01 million people in Xinjiang at the same time,” i.e., one in every 25 residents in the region. The news outlet stated this was likely an underestimate, based on accounts of former detainees who described overcrowded conditions in the detention centers.

In July, authorities permitted an Associated Press (AP) reporter to enter a detention camp in Dabancheng, north of Urumqi. In its subsequent article, AP estimated the site could hold approximately 10,000 people. The article stated detainees all wore uniforms and sat with “their legs crossed in [the] lotus position and their backs ramrod straight, numbered and tagged, gazing at a television playing grainy black-and-white images of Chinese Communist Party history.” AP reported 25-foot-tall concrete walls surrounded the camp, with watchtowers and topped with electric wire as well as face-scanning turnstiles and guards holding rifles placed at the entrance. The AP also described rooms in which inmates could speak through computers to lawyers, relatives, and police as well as medical rooms with instructions on the wall instructing staff on procedures to deal with sick inmates and to force-feed inmates on hunger strikes. The AP stated that although the government claimed in 2019 it had closed “training centers,” satellite imagery and interviews with experts and former detainees suggested it converted some, like Dabancheng, into prisons or pretrial detention facilities.

In September, former detainee Baqitali Nur told the *Guardian* that surveillance cameras were ubiquitous in detention camps. “Inside the cell, here was a camera, there was a camera, on all sides and angles there were cameras,” he said. “The only camera-free place was where the toilet was.” The *Guardian* reported at least four other survivors who testified recalled cells and facilities that were surveilled from floor to ceiling. In April, the *New Yorker* reported that former detainee Anar

Sabit, an ethnic Kazakh, said there were cameras even in the toilet and shower areas.

The *Financial Times* reported in October that one <sup>academic</sup> researcher who studied Xinjiang's internment system indicated the detention facilities were the largest internment of a religious minority since the Second World War. According to the researcher, some detainees were able to escape punishment with displays of loyalty, but "those who lacked these masks were dehumanised under the lights and cameras of the camps."

There were numerous reports of individuals being incarcerated, sometimes for lengthy periods of time, held under harsh conditions, physically and sexually abused, and subjected to involuntary sterilization. Many individuals disappeared in prior years, but relatives only learned what happened to them during the year. Some ethnic Uyghur and Kazakh individuals who had been held in detention facilities managed to emigrate abroad during the year, where they were able to speak with human rights NGOs and journalists about their experiences. Local observers said many incidents related to abuses or pressure on Uyghurs and other Muslims went unreported to international media or NGOs due to government restrictions on the free flow of information.

In October, CNN interviewed a former Chinese police officer who served multiple tours in Xinjiang and was directly involved in the severe physical mistreatment and violence undertaken against Uyghurs and other ethnic minority communities. The former police officer stated 150,000 police officers had been recruited to participate in the province-wide "strike hard" campaign and that there were arrest quotas they had to meet. The officer stated, "We took (them) all forcibly overnight. If there were hundreds of people in one county in this area, then you had to arrest these hundreds of people." During interrogations, police officers would "kick them, beat them (until they're) bruised and swollen... Until they kneel on the floor crying." "Interrogation" methods included shackling people to a metal or wooden "tiger chair" (rendering them immobile), sexual violence against men and women, electrocutions, and waterboarding. The source said guards forced inmates to stay awake for days and denied them food and water. Authorities accused detainees of terror offenses, but the source said he believed "none" of the hundreds of prisoners he was involved in arresting had committed a crime.

On October 23, the *Globe and Mail* published the account of one Uyghur woman's experiences teaching Chinese in a detention camp where she described a systematic "dehumanization" campaign targeting the detainees. Due to

overcrowding, detainees had to take turns sleeping on the concrete floor. Many of the cells did not have toilets, so detainees used a bucket that they were permitted to empty once a week. According to the *Globe and Mail*, detainees “took on a haunted expression that came with the physical and psychological violence that permeated the camp. The detainees became deeply fearful. Their voices trembled when they answered questions in class.”

In June, *Deutsche Welle* reported that during the year several members of the Uyghur diaspora learned authorities had arrested their family members and sentenced them to lengthy prison terms. Sources in Xinjiang confirmed to *Deutsche Welle* that authorities sentenced the brother and sister of Uyghur linguist and refugee from Xinjiang Abduweli Ayup to 14 years and 12 years in prison, respectively. According to Ayup, police had arrested and detained 72 Uyghurs associated with him.

In May, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported that Mihray Erkin, Abduweli Ayup’s niece, died in November 2020 while being held in an internment camp. Authorities had detained her after she returned to Kashgar (Chinese: Kashi) Prefecture from Japan in August 2019, reportedly at the insistence of her parents. A source from her hometown told RFA that authorities falsified a medical report stating she died of a disease and forced her family members to record video testimonies stating she had this disease and that she died at home. The source said her death may instead have been the result of abuse suffered during interrogation.

RFA reported in July that sources confirmed Uyghur anthropology Professor Rahile Dawut of Xinjiang University, who had been missing and presumed detained since 2017, was sentenced to prison. The charges, length of sentence, and whereabouts of Dawut remained unknown at year’s end.

RFA reported in December that sources confirmed Uyghur Shazadigul Tomur died from an unknown stomach ailment while working in a forced labor facility after authorities had denied her medical treatment. Sources told RFA that authorities detained Tomur in 2018 and eventually sent her to an internment camp where they forced her to work in a sock factory. Tomur reportedly informed camp officials that she had severe abdominal pain, but authorities ignored her repeated requests for medical treatment. Sources told RFA that in September 2020 she began vomiting blood, lost consciousness, and eventually died. RFA reported local officials confirmed the details of her detention and death.

In December, RFA reported authorities confirmed a retired Uyghur civil servant, Niyaz Nasir, died in an internment camp in late 2020. According to RFA sources, officials detained Nasir in 2018, although the details of his arrest were still unknown. Nasir's family reportedly requested authorities release him in 2018 due to his deteriorating health, but officials rejected the family's request.

Sources stated authorities continued to use detailed information to rank citizens' "trustworthiness" using various criteria. The *Economist* in 2018 described the rankings as "explicitly racist: people are suspected merely on account of their ethnicity." According to the *Economist*, being labelled "untrustworthy" could lead to being detained by authorities. Officials deemed individuals as trustworthy, average, or untrustworthy depending on how they fit into the following categories: ages 15 to 55 years old (i.e., of military age); of Uyghur ethnicity; unemployed; possessed religious knowledge; prayed five times a day; had a passport; had ever overstayed a visa; wore religious clothing or had long beards; had family members living abroad; homeschooled their children (which was prohibited throughout the country); or had visited one of the "sensitive countries." According to HRW, the 26 "sensitive countries" were Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, and Yemen.

RFA reported that in January, Haji Mirzahid Kerimi, an 82-year-old poet, died while serving an 11-year sentence in a Xinjiang prison for publishing "problematic" books on Uyghur history. PRC authorities had previously banned five books written by Kerimi and sentenced him in 2017 despite his significant health issues. According to RFA, an anonymous prison official said Kerimi "jumped and fell."

In February, the *New Yorker* published the accounts of several former detainees, all of whom had been detained in 2017 or later. Erbaqyt Otarbai, an ethnic Kazakh, described lengthy interrogations after being detained for having WhatsApp – which authorities described as "illegal software" – on his phone. Otarbai stated authorities beat him and kept him for long periods of time in "tiger chairs," and that he witnessed the torture of other detainees.

The *New Yorker* article also described a similar experience for Aynur, a primary school teacher, and her husband Nurlan Kokteubai, a mathematics teacher, both ethnic Kazakhs. They had been living in Kazakhstan since 2011, but in 2017 the Party secretary of Aynur's former school in Chapchal County contacted her by

phone and WeChat insisting she return to Xinjiang. She arrived in Xinjiang in 2017 after authorities told her she would only need to stay for two weeks. Once there, however, authorities required her to remain longer, so her husband joined her three months later. Police accused Kokteubai of being “under suspicion of having dealings with individuals suspected of terrorist activities.” While her husband was detained, authorities forced Aynur to attend “reeducation” training and Mandarin language lessons.

In March, RFA reported that Uyghur textile trader and entrepreneur Kurbanjan Abdukerim had died four days after his February 23 release from an internment camp in Atush (Atushi) City, Kizilsu Kirghiz (Kezileisu Keerkezi) Autonomous Prefecture. While RFA was unable to confirm the exact details of Abdukerim’s cause of death, he had reportedly lost more than 100 pounds during three years of imprisonment in an internment camp beginning in early 2018, which raised questions as to whether his death was linked to malnutrition or an infectious disease. Authorities originally imprisoned him for traveling to Mecca several years earlier, which was legal at the time.

In April, the *New Yorker* reported that ethnic Kazakh Sabit from Kuytun City, Ili Kazakh (Yili Hasake) Autonomous Prefecture, who emigrated to Canada, returned to Xinjiang via Kazakhstan in 2017 to manage the affairs of her recently deceased father. At the airport in Urumqi when she tried to depart, authorities flagged her for detainment and “reeducation” due to her international travel. Authorities transferred Sabit back to Kuytun, where they detained and interrogated her for 19 days. They forced her to undergo a medical exam that included giving blood and urine samples, and taking an electrocardiogram, an ultrasound, and a chest X-ray. At the police station, officers took photographs, fingerprints, and a DNA sample. Authorities gave her an iris scan and compelled her to speak into a microphone to capture her voiceprint. The *New Yorker* article said this data was uploaded to the Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJOP), a massive database authorities in Xinjiang maintain that collects a variety of personal information on the lives and movements of individuals. After being initially told she would be allowed to leave the country, officials rearrested Sabit and sent her to a “reeducation” camp where she and other detainees lived in overcrowded conditions and under constant surveillance – including in the toilet and shower areas – and studied CCP propaganda. Sabit said she and the other women had to learn communist songs and sing them loudly before each meal. If they did not show sufficient zeal, guards threatened to withhold food. After 20 months in detention, authorities finally allowed Sabit to leave the country.

In HRW's report "*Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots*," the NGO reported that ethnic Uyghur Mihrigul Tursun witnessed physical and psychological punishment, ill-treatment, and poor medical care during her time in the detention camps. During a three-month period, she said she witnessed nine deaths. She described "being stripped naked, forced to undergo a medical examination, and being electroshocked and beaten" during interrogations. According to Tursun, 40 to 68 women, chained at the wrists and ankles, were placed in the same 420 square-foot underground cell in which they were expected to urinate and defecate. The cell "had just one small hole in the ceiling for ventilation."

In May, RFA reported that Uyghur businessman Abduhelil Hashim from Ghulja (Yining), Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, died under mysterious circumstances while being treated at a prison hospital. A court had sentenced Hashim in 2020 for "religious extremism." According to the report, 40 years earlier, Hashim had received religious education from a neighbor, which was the basis for his conviction of extremism. RFA and family members requested more information on the cause of death, but the hospital nurse said the cause was "unclear." Hashim's nephew stated he believed Hashim may have died as a result of torture or other mistreatment while in prison.

In September, RFA reported that Yaqub Haji, a Uyghur businessman who donated money for the construction of a mosque in Ghulja, Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, and was later arrested for "religious extremism" in 2018, was tortured and died in an internment camp. A friend told RFA that officials tortured Haji because he would not confess to the "crime" of contributing money to the construction of religious buildings.

In December, the *New York Post* reported Tursunay Ziyawudun's account of detainment in a "reeducation" center in northern Xinjiang. Authorities detained Ziyawudun in 2017 and again in 2018. She reported camp officials required her to sing patriotic songs and told her that Islam did not exist. While in the camp, she said, "I was gang-raped and my private parts were tortured with electricity." She also reported that officials required her to take "sterilization pills," which she said rendered her unable to have children.

In February 2020, *Foreign Policy* reported authorities detained Hui Muslims in Xinjiang for travel overseas, including to Pakistan, for work or study, accessing religious content on the internet, performing the Hajj, and visiting mosques. According to one former detainee, authorities treated all Muslim prisoners the

same. “It didn’t matter if you were Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Hui... If you had gone to a mosque before, you were there.”

In October, RFA reported that Uyghur imam Qeyimahun Qari died in 2018 after spending two years in an internment camp. Sources said police frequently interrogated Qari inside the camp to try to obtain information on Uyghurs who came to his mosque, and they tortured him when he declined to reveal their names and personal details. Sources also said 59-year-old Qari was healthy at the time of his arrest in 2017 and had previously survived a 15-year prison sentence. The sources said this incident showed recent conditions in the detention camps were harsher than in prisons and other detention facilities before 2017.

In March, Amnesty International reported that Ekpar Asat, a Uyghur journalist and entrepreneur, held a three-minute video conversation with his family in late January. This was his first contact with family since April 2016, when public security officers detained him. Asat reportedly told family members that his health was declining both physically and mentally. His family said Asat had lost significant weight and that he looked pale and had many black spots on his face.

In December, *Metro News* reported that Omer Faruh’s two youngest daughters, ages five and six, had been missing for five years after he, his wife, and two eldest daughters fled Xinjiang. In 2016, Faruh’s wife Meryem called him while he was visiting Saudi Arabia to inform him that authorities had ordered her and their two eldest daughters to turn over their passports. Meryem and the two eldest daughters were able to book flights out of the country. The family left the two youngest daughters, who did not have passports, with Meryem’s parents in Xinjiang. Faruh told *Metro News* that he learned authorities had sent Meryem’s parents to internment camps in 2017.

RFA reported in April that sources learned authorities in Kashgar (Kashi) Prefecture had sentenced renowned Uyghur author Ahtam Omer in a 2018 secret trial to 20 years in prison for “separatism.” Authorities arrested Omer on March 12, 2017, and held him incommunicado. In 2020, authorities included a collection of Omer’s short stories entitled *Child of the Eagle* in a book burning campaign. Sources told RFA authorities arrested Omer, his brother Anwar Omer, and his nephew Iskander Omer ostensibly because Ahtam had sent Iskander to study in Egypt and sent money to him.

In October, the U.S.-based NGO Chinese Human Rights Defenders reported on the arrest and disappearance of three Uyghur intellectuals: Gheytratjan Osman, a

professor of Uyghur language and literature at Xinjiang University whom authorities arrested in 2018 and sentenced to 10 years in prison for “separatism”; Qeyum Muhammad, an actor and associate professor at the Xinjiang Institute of Arts; and Tursunjan Nurmamat, a medical researcher at Shanghai Tongji University whom authorities arrested in April.

In September, the NGO Campaign for Uyghurs marked the third anniversary of the disappearance of Gulshan Abbas, a Uyghur doctor missing since September 2018, and noted that the PRC had held her prisoner to “punish family members for speaking the truth about the Chinese regime’s genocidal crimes against humanity.” In December 2020, human rights groups and family members reported that authorities had sentenced Abbas to 20 years in prison on terrorism-related charges. The government issued the sentence in March 2019 following a secret trial, but Abbas’ family only learned of the sentence in December 2020.

In April, USA Today reported that ethnic Uyghur Imamjan Ibrahim, a doctor and medical researcher living in Boston, disappeared in 2017 when he traveled back to Kashgar to visit his parents. Friends in the United States told USA Today they feared PRC authorities had detained him and taken him to an internment camp. A Uyghur American friend who tried to learn his whereabouts said two Uyghur women contacted her and said authorities had released Ibrahim and he was in good condition, but the friend said she thought this was a lie.

In March, Amnesty International profiled several Uyghur families living outside China whose children had disappeared as a result of the government’s detention campaign. Mihriban Kader and Ablikim Memtinin left their four children with grandparents when they fled to Italy in 2016 after facing harassment from Xinjiang authorities. Authorities detained the children’s grandparents soon thereafter and sent the four children to various orphanages and boarding schools. When Kader and Memtinin received approval in Italy to have their children join them, PRC authorities seized the children on their way to the Italian consulate in Shanghai. Kader stated, “Now my children are in the hands of the Chinese government and I am not sure I will be able to meet them again in my lifetime.”

There were multiple reports that individuals sexually assaulted women in internment camps. On February 2, the BBC published accounts of several former detainees and one guard stating they experienced or saw evidence of an organized system of mass rape, sexual abuse, and torture. Tursunay Ziyawudun said authorities removed women from the cells “every night” and one or more masked Han Chinese men raped them. She said she was raped and sexually assaulted on

three occasions over the course of her nine-month detention, each time by two or three men. She also witnessed masked men taking several other women away to a “black room” where there were no surveillance cameras. She also described authorities forcibly fitting women with intrauterine devices (IUDs) or sterilizing them. Gulzira Auelkhan, an ethnic Kazakh woman who was detained for 18 months in the camp system, told the BBC that authorities forced her to strip Uyghur women naked and handcuff them, before leaving them alone with Han Chinese men. She said Han Chinese civilians from outside the camp also assaulted detainees and “would pay money to have their pick of the prettiest young inmates.” She stated the camp had a system of organized rape. One female detainee told the BBC that prison guards raped her with an electric baton. Sayragul Sauytbay, a former teacher forced to work in the camps, said rape was common and described an incident in which police took turns raping a woman in front of 100 other inmates. During the attack, “they watched people closely and picked out anyone who resisted, clenched their fists, closed their eyes, or looked away, and took them for punishment.”

In February, *Bitter Winter*, an online publication that tracks religious liberty and human rights abuses in the country, reported that sexual abuse, including rape, of males, in particular younger boys, was a regular rather than an occasional occurrence in internment camps. Amnesty International also reported camp officials raped male detainees.

In March, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy reported that former detainees described “systematic mass rape and other sexual abuse in the detention facilities. There [were] also accounts of gang rapes perpetrated by security officials, including references to masked men, the use of an electrified stick,” and other methods. Authorities attempted to sexually humiliate detainees by forcing them to “routinely undress, squat in the nude, and smear ground chili pepper paste on their genitals in the shower while filmed.” Multiple women said there were surveillance cameras in both toilet and shower facilities, giving detainees no privacy when using them.

In October, CNN reported a former Xinjiang police officer stated he witnessed security officials at the detention centers using sexual torture methods to extract confessions. He said, “We would tie two electrical wires on the tips [of an electric baton] and set the wires on their genitals while the person is tied up.” Uyghur scholar Abduwli Ayup stated he was gang raped while in police custody in 2013 after authorities arrested him for teaching the Uyghur language at a kindergarten.

In May, BBC reported that since 2014, the PRC had imprisoned or detained at least 630 Muslim religious leaders in Xinjiang. Many of the detained clerics faced charges such as “propagating extremism,” “gathering a crowd to disturb social order,” and “inciting separatism.” According to testimonies of relatives, these charges stemmed from activities such as preaching, leading prayer groups, and other regular activities of imams. The BBC article drew from a joint Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP)-Justice for All report, which stated that of the 630 detained Muslim religious leaders, authorities sentenced 304 to prison rather than sending them to the “reeducation camps.” Court documents or testimony indicated 96 percent received sentences of at least five years, with 26 percent receiving sentences of 20 years or more, including 14 individuals who received life sentences. The UHRP-Justice for All report also found evidence that 18 religious figures had died in detention or shortly after their release. Several media outlets reported religious figures, students, imams, and persons who prayed regularly often received lengthy prison sentences.

In February, RFA reported that sources learned that in 2019, authorities sentenced Abdusalam Rozi from Ghulja County, Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, to 18 years in prison in a case that was “connected to politics.” Authorities had previously arrested Rozi in 1998 and sentenced him to 18 years in prison on charges of “splitting the country and distributing antigovernment propaganda” following protests in 1997. RFA stated there were other reports of authorities resentencing political prisoners as punishment or for not being “thoroughly reformed.”

In July, Bloomberg News reported PRC authorities continued to deny European Union diplomats access to Xinjiang on the grounds that the diplomats wanted to meet with Uyghur economist Ilham Tohti, whom authorities sentenced in 2014 to life imprisonment for “separatism.” Xinjiang government spokesman Xu Guixiang stated, “They want to talk to Ilham and other criminals – this is disrespect for China’s sovereignty.” Before his imprisonment, Tohti was a professor at Minzu University of China in Beijing and an outspoken critic of relations between Uyghurs and the Han majority. The European Parliament awarded him the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in 2019.

RFA reported in February that in 2017, authorities in Kashgar Prefecture sentenced Obulqasim Abdurehim, a Uyghur engineer, and 13 other individuals he associated with in a *meshrep*, a fraternal organization that is traditional in Uyghur culture, to lengthy prison terms for “illegal gathering and organizing.” Authorities interrogated Abdurehim for more than six months to force him to admit that 10

years earlier he had paid a fine rather than comply with authorities' demands that his wife abort their third child – a violation of regulations at the time that restricted ethnic minorities to two children per family. Authorities reportedly claimed Abdurehim and his wife's refusal to get an abortion constituted evidence of "religious extremism" and sentenced him to 17 years in prison. RFA sources learned in February that another member of the meshrep, Kashgar Prefecture transportation chief Abliz Tohtaji, received seven years in prison for his involvement with the meshrep.

RFA reported in February that it had confirmed authorities sentenced Bakihaji Helil, a Uyghur student from Atush City, Kizilsu Kirghiz Autonomous Prefecture, to nine years in prison in 2017 for being "opposed to national education" and "pos[ing] a danger" to China. Helil was among 5,000 other Uyghur students Xinjiang authorities ordered to return starting in 2017. Helil had been studying religion in Egypt, but authorities threatened to harass his family if he did not return to Atush City.

According to RFA, in March, authorities upheld the conviction of Mamatali Kashgarli, an ethnic Uyghur and Turkish national, for "terrorist activities." He was arrested in 2017 and sentenced the same year, although a court overturned the case in 2018. At the retrial, the court reinstated Kashgarli's 15-year prison sentence. RFA sources indicated that Kashgarli returned to Xinjiang from Turkey in 2001. His family told RFA that Kashgarli's ties to his family in Turkey were likely the cause for his sentencing. Kashgarli's brother Ahmet Kashgarli told RFA that he had lived in Turkey for 33 years and never had any problems with the Turkish government and said, "In the view of China, all of us living outside [the homeland] right now are terrorists."

AP reported in April that Uyghurs Sattar Sawut, former head of the regional education department, and author Yalqun Rozi both received suspended death sentences for charges including writing and publishing school textbooks in 2003 and 2009 that authorities said were designed to "split the country." Rozi's son called the charges "absurd," telling AP, "[t]hese textbooks were sanctioned by the state." Rozi's son told AP the textbooks contained historical tales of Uyghurs that had nothing to do with terrorism, and that the prosecutions were aimed at cultural destruction and forced assimilation.

RFA reported that in January, authorities sent Zaytunhan Ismail, a Uyghur village elder in Turpan (Tulufan) City, to an internment camp after accusing her of "religious extremism." Ismail was a prominent member of her village,

participating in a number of community and religious activities such as weddings and funerals. According to a Turpan police officer, in 2020, Ismail had successfully mediated a domestic violence dispute, but authorities detained her for “getting involved in a legal matter.”

In June, RFA reported that according to the Norway-based NGO Uyghuryar Foundation, authorities in Atush City, Kizilsu Kirghiz Autonomous Prefecture, sentenced four Uyghur entrepreneurs to prison in April. Authorities sentenced Iminjan Rahmitulla, founder of a shopping mall and one of the founders of the Grand Bazaar in Kashgar City, to 20 years in prison for “supporting terrorists” for providing donations to the family members of detained Uyghurs. Authorities also detained Rahmitulla’s sister and daughter, but their whereabouts and status were unknown at year’s end. Courts handed down 20-year sentences to brothers Rehmütulla Semet and Abdusopur Semet and a 17-year sentence to Musajan Imam for “engaging in separatist activities.”

RFA reported that on September 1, authorities arrested Arkin Iminjan, an ethnic Uyghur carpenter from Chapchal Xibe (ChabuChaer Xibo) County, Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, for making a telephone call to a “marked” person (person under surveillance). Iminjan previously served six years in prison following 2009 unrest in Urumqi. From 2017 to 2019, authorities held him in a “reeducation” center. A former classmate of Iminjan told RFA, “I believe that, actually, the officials wanted to detain Arkin again in order to meet official quotas on the numbers of Uyghurs to detain.”

On January 4, BuzzFeed News published an analysis of the connection between Xinjiang’s detention centers and forced labor. The report’s analysis of satellite imagery indicated that of the 385 detention centers built in the region since 2017, “at least 135 of these compounds also hold factory buildings. Forced labor on a vast scale is almost certainly taking place inside facilities like these, according to researchers and interviews with former detainees.” Satellite imagery analysis indicated the factory facilities collectively covered more than 21 million square feet. According to BuzzFeed News, detention camp factories were woven deeply into the region’s economy. Former detainee Auelkhan told BuzzFeed News she and other women traveled by bus from their detention center to a factory where they sewed gloves. Former detainees said they were never given a choice to work or not work and that they “earned a pittance or no pay at all.” Dina Nurdybai, who was detained in 2017 and 2018, said at a factory inside the interment camp she worked in a cubicle that was locked from the outside, sewing pockets onto school uniforms.

BuzzFeed News reported that the U.S.-based nonprofit research institute Center for Advanced Defense Studies (C4ADS) compared the locations of factories identified by BuzzFeed News to a database that compiles address information from China's government registry for businesses. C4ADS identified 1,500 Chinese companies located at or directly next to the factories. Of those, 92 listed "import/export" as part of the scope of their business.

In February, the *New Yorker* reported that a government program called Xinjiang Aid transferred more than 150,000 "surplus rural workers" to jobs outside the region since 2018. The *New Yorker* stated, "Official claims that camp populations are declining may therefore be accurate, as detainees are increasingly sent to work in factories and on farms, or else sentenced and transferred to conventional prisons." A 2020 ASPI report entitled *Uyghurs for Sale* stated workers lived in segregated factory dormitories, underwent organized Mandarin language and ideological training outside working hours, were subject to constant surveillance, and were forbidden from participating in religious observances. ASPI said, "Numerous sources, including government documents, show that transferred workers are assigned minders and have limited freedom of movement."

In October, ASPI stated that according to PRC media reporting, between 2017 and 2021, 600,000 workers in Xinjiang were scheduled to be trained or transferred to different parts of the country under various labor schemes. ASPI's research of government documents revealed that the labor transfer programs often sent workers to development projects connected to government-owned entities.

In March, the BBC reported that Xinjiang authorities' use of labor transfer programs ran a "high risk of coercion and [was] similarly designed to assimilate minorities by changing their lifestyles and thinking." The report described a video from 2017 showing authorities attempting to persuade workers to sign up for labor transfer schemes that would send them far away from their homes. When no one agreed to sign up initially, authorities went door to door pressuring individuals. Eventually, a young woman reluctantly said, "I'll go if others go." The BBC report stated authorities intended through the labor and detention programs to "replace 'old' Uyghur loyalties to culture and the Islamic faith with a 'modern' materialist identity and an enforced allegiance to the Communist Party."

The June Amnesty International report "*Like We Were Enemies in a War*" included testimonies of former detainees that showed a clear link between detention centers and compulsory labor. Once detainees had been determined to be ready for release, authorities decided whether to send them to a "skills improvement class."

Some detainees reported they had “little or no choice or control but to accept employment or ‘training placement.’” According to one detainee, authorities said if he volunteered to work as a security guard at one of the camps, he would then be allowed to leave the detention facility.

On May 2, the Jamestown Foundation published a report entitled *Coercive Labor and Forced Displacement in Xinjiang’s Cross-Regional Labor Transfer Program*. According to the report, Chinese academics maintained that due to a lack of population mobility “the excessively strong atmosphere of religious belief cannot be diluted, and the development of social modernity is retarded.” Chinese academic publications described labor transfers as a crucial means to fragment Uyghur society and mitigate the “negative” impact of religion. The report stated analysis of government documents showed a “state-run scheme to forcibly uproot [minorities in Xinjiang], assimilate them and reduce their population density.” The Jamestown Foundation report also stated there were “credible grounds for concluding” that the forced labor system met the criteria for crimes against humanity and that “Beijing’s use of coercive labor transfer to suppress religiosity, achieve poverty alleviation targets, and ‘educate’ Uyghurs in the political ideology of the state” directly violated the International Labor Organization’s Convention for the Abolition of Forced Labor.

In early October, Reuters reported a foreign electronics manufacturer employed 365 Uyghur workers from Xinjiang for the company’s plant in Qinzhou City, Guangxi Province. According to Reuters, in at least one instance, government authorities paid for a charter flight that delivered the workers under police escort from Hotan City to the plant. A notice posted on an official Qinzhou police social media account in February 2020 also described the transfer. Later in October, the manufacturer told Reuters it decided to “end its relationship with the staffing agency that hired these workers based on feedback on how to best secure its supply chain and in light of ongoing regulatory and legislative changes globally.”

The USHMM’s November report “*To Make Us Slowly Disappear*” stated official government documents suggested “the CCP views larger families within the Turkic Muslim communities as both being a result of, and a catalyst for, religious extremism and ‘splittism.’” The report stated, “Chinese policy appears to be largely directed toward destroying, in substantial part, the Uyghur community’s ability to regenerate, primarily through attacking the reproductive capacity of Uyghur women.” Starting in 2017, government statistics indicated the government began to implement a series of coercive measures intended to reduce the population growth rate among Xinjiang’s ethnic and religious minorities. These

policies reportedly included forced sterilizations, forced insertions of IUDs, involuntary abortions, the separation of Uyghur couples of child-bearing age through detentions and forcible transfer, and “the coercion of young, unmarried Uyghur women into marriages with Han Chinese men.”

In May, ASPI published a report entitled *Family De-planning: The Coercive Campaign to Drive Down Indigenous Birth-rates in Xinjiang*. Citing the PRC’s own population statistics, the ASPI report showed that birth rates in the region dropped nearly 50 percent between 2017-2019. The report stated the largest declines occurred predominately in prefectures with high concentrations of minority communities. According to 2019 and 2020 data, the birth rate across the 29 counties with indigenous-majority populations fell by 58.5 percent from the 2011-2015 baseline average. In counties that were over 90 percent indigenous, the birth rate fell by as much as 66.3 percent in 2019-2020. ASPI also reported that the government deployed other coercive measures, including large fines, disciplinary punishment, extrajudicial internment of men and women, or the threat of internment for “illegal births.”

In October, ASPI published a report entitled *The Architecture of Repression: Unpacking Xinjiang’s Governance* that examined a series local government documents from 2017-2021. These previously unpublished documents detailed authorities’ approach to preventing births. Starting in 2017, authorities retroactively punished women from ethnic minority groups for violations of family planning policies as far back as 1992. These punishments included fines, forced sterilization, and internment. The report analyzed government documents that indicated that in 2020, the Xinjiang Health Commission spent 140 renminbi (\$22 million) on reducing birthrates and punishing illegal births in southern Xinjiang. In addition, “a taskforce called the ‘Targeted Crackdown on Illegal Births Leading Small Group’ was created at the prefecture, county, and township levels, as well as inside government departments and companies.” At the community, village, and neighborhood level, “[p]unishing illegal births [was] a key performance indicator for local officials, and any violation of family planning regulations [was] grounds for their immediate demotion or dismissal.”

RFA reported that in September, the State Council Information Office issued a white paper entitled *Xinjiang Population Dynamics and Data*, stating the population of Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities in the region had increased between 2010 and 2016. Independent academics, analysts, and human rights advocates questioned the veracity of the underlying statistics and stated the report ignored the precipitous drop in minority populations from 2017 on ward. A human

rights attorney stated, “Statistics are the CCP’s tool only. They are definitely not credible. China’s narrative is to counter Western accusations of genocide.”

According to the XUAR government-run news agency *Tianshan*, on September 1, Nurlan Abelmanjen, Chairman of the Xinjiang Regional Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), presided over a meeting of the CPPCC on “promoting the Sinicization of Islam in Xinjiang.” Abelmanjen stated it was necessary to study President Xi’s writings, actively guide Islamic religious leaders and believers to reform their ideas, promote changes in customs, pursue what he called modern civilization and progress, create a social atmosphere conducive to the Sinicization of Islam in Xinjiang, and implement relevant Xinjiang Party Committee policies and measures.

A September report by UHRP entitled “*They Sent Her to a Concentration Camp Because She Came to Turkey*”: *The Persecution of Uyghurs Based on Their Turkic and Muslim Identity* included the transcript of a January interview with Zumrat Dawut, a Uyghur woman living in exile who spent two months in an internment camp. In the interview, Dawut described how camp officials and indoctrination teachers told detainees, “You were not originally Muslims. Islam is an infectious virus that reached you later from Arabia.”

The November USHMM report stated authorities required imams to undergo training and state certification in order to practice, and that religious weddings and funerals required written permission from the state. Media reported authorities continued to conduct regular, sometimes daily, inspections of private homes to ensure no religious activities were occurring.

In January, RFA reported that authorities restricted Muslims from performing circumcision and the religious rites associated with it. According to a local source, authorities required that circumcisions be performed in designated hospitals. The source said that in January, authorities placed ethnic Uyghur Memet Ibrahim from Alaqagha, Aksu Prefecture, in an internment camp because he had his six-year-old son circumcised outside of a hospital.

Media and human rights organizations reported that 2020 SARA regulations stating only the Islamic Association of China was permitted to organize Muslims’ pilgrimage trips remained in effect. These regulations stated that those who applied to join the Hajj must be “patriotic, law-abiding, and have good conduct,” must have never before participated in the Hajj, and must be in sound physical and mental health. They also must be able to completely pay the costs associated with

going on the Hajj and must oppose religious extremism. According to a notice issued by the Islamic Association of China on June 15, citing the risk of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government suspended all Hajj organization activities; therefore, there were no organized pilgrimage trips during the year.

Reports published from March through May on the official websites of local governments in the XUAR indicated authorities restricted or banned certain groups of Muslims, including CCP members (who were required to be atheists), their relatives, students, and employees of state-owned enterprises and state-run organizations, from observing Ramadan.

In April, RFA reported it contacted a police officer in Sheher (Shufu) County, Kashgar Prefecture, who stated restrictions on fasting during Ramadan eased in 2021 compared with previous years and that authorities told local residents they were free to fast “if they want to.” He stated, however, that meetings about Ramadan were “always being held” at his police station, with authorities informing the public to “stay far away from religious extremism.” The officer said he had not seen anybody who appeared to be fasting. According to other sources, local Muslims remained afraid of punishment or being associated with extremism if they observed the fast. A resident of Yengisheher (Shule) County, Kashgar Prefecture, when asked by RFA if he intended to observe Ramadan, stated, “Oh no – there’s no such thing now.” The resident said he and his relatives did not know the dates on which Ramadan fell in 2021.

The government continued to control the administration of mosques and to restrict access to houses of worship, requiring worshippers to apply for mosque entry permits. In March, the Council on Foreign Relations reported that authorities regarded attending services at mosques to be “extremist” behavior. Sending texts containing Quranic verses was also considered “extremist.” Individuals who did either of these things risked being sent to detention camps or prison. In May, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported worshippers at the Great White Mosque in Urumqi had to go through x-ray machines and metal detectors, and pass face-scanning cameras to enter.

Witnesses and former prisoners stated authorities forced Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and other Muslims in custody to renounce Islam, criticize their own Islamic beliefs and those of fellow inmates, and recite CCP propaganda.

In May, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported that only 800 to 900 Muslims attended Friday prayers at the Id Kah Mosque in Kashgar City, according to the

mosque's imam, Mamat Juma, compared with 4,000 to 5,000 persons a decade previous. He attributed the drop to a natural shift in values, not government policy, saying the younger generation wanted to spend more time working than praying. One imam living in exile told the newspaper attendance at services were "staged" for outside visitors, such as foreign journalists. The imam said, "People know exactly what to do, how to lie, it's not something new for them."

According to human rights groups and international media, in addition to the IJOP big-data collection program, Xinjiang authorities continued to maintain extensive and invasive security and surveillance, in part to gain information regarding individuals' religious adherence and practices. Human rights groups said surveillance was more severe in parts of the country where religious minorities predominated, including the XUAR, compared with other parts of the country with ethnic Han Chinese majorities, due to the connection between religion and the ethnic and cultural identities of these groups.

According to government documents, Han Chinese officials continued to implement a surveillance system, in which teams of six – composed of police or local officials and one Uyghur language speaker – went to each house and compiled information on occupants. Since the program began in 2014, more than 200,000 cadres from all levels of the government were deployed to more than 8,500 villages. The teams reported on "extremist" behavior, such as abstaining from alcohol, fasting during Ramadan, and wearing long beards. They reported on the presence of "undesirable" items such as Qurans or occupants' perceived propensity for "extremist" ideology.

In January, the investigative journalism organization The Intercept reported on a leaked police database that showed how authorities used a vast array of tools to conduct surveillance and monitor ethnic minority communities living in the region. According to the report, police in Urumqi used a tool that plugged into mobile phones, known as the "antiterrorism sword," that allowed authorities to download the contents of individuals' mobile phones. This tool was "deployed so frequently that authorities worried it was alienating the populace." The leaked database detailed the presence of ubiquitous security checkpoints and surveillance cameras on the streets as well as telephone, online, and financial surveillance, "showing how granular surveillance purportedly on the watch for extremism is often simply looking at religious activity." The Intercept stated these tracking policies succeeded in driving down mosque attendance. The database also offered evidence that "the 'Physicals for All' biometric collection program, which authorities insisted was solely a health initiative, [was] intended as part of the

policing system.” The Intercept told of one man whom police investigated based on the religious activities of his eldest sister five months prior. The sister and her husband had invited another Uyghur couple to join a religious discussion group on the messaging app Tencent QQ. Because he had contact with his sister, police confiscated the brother’s mobile phone and assigned a cadre member to “control and monitor” him.

In March, Reuters reported the Internet Protocol Video Market (IPVM), which researches surveillance technology, published a report stating the government enlisted a number of technology companies to develop cameras capable of identifying specific characteristics of ethnic minorities using facial recognition software, including eyebrow size, skin tone, hair color, and hair style. The report stated, “It’s the first time we’ve ever seen public security camera networks that are tracking people by these sensitive categories explicitly at this scale.” IPVM and human rights groups said using such criteria would make it easier for authorities to comb different databases for specific individuals, or members of a particular ethnic group such as Uyghurs.

In May, the BBC reported authorities were also combining facial recognition technologies with artificial intelligence to assess individuals’ emotional states in an effort to implement predictive policing. Citing an anonymous software engineer who had worked on this technology, the report stated authorities deployed cameras to detect “minute changes in facial expressions and skin pores.” The software engineer said, “The Chinese government uses Uyghurs as test subjects for various experiments just like rats are used in laboratories.”

In its October report, ASPI stated the surveillance regimen utilized a combination of local neighborhood police stations, neighborhood grid management, home visits conducted by local government and party officials, and “joint households” (families formally assigned to monitor each other) to systematically monitor ethnic minority communities. This system was designed to “collect intelligence,” cultivate informants to report on their neighbors, share party propaganda, and monitor changes in the behavior of individuals of concern.

In its “Summary Judgment” released in December, the “Uyghur Tribunal” concluded based on research and eyewitness testimony that “[b]y means of intense monitoring, surveillance, facial recognition and advanced technologies specifically targeted at Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities, parts of Xinjiang have become, to some of those ethnic minorities, an open-air prison... Neighbours, members of

families, and other members of the community were incentivised or coerced in various ways to spy on each other.”

According to HRW, officials considered turning off one’s mobile phone repeatedly or using a cellular phone that was not registered to the individual as suspicious behavior. Both actions could lead to detention.

According to media and the accounts of Uyghurs living in exile, authorities continued to have more than one million CCP officials from other parts of the country live part-time with local families, who were required to accept this arrangement. According to a 2018 CNN report, the government instituted these home stays (the “Pair Up and Become a Family” program) in 2014 to target agricultural households in southern Xinjiang. The government said the program was part of efforts to combat “terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism.” The government required families to provide detailed information on their personal lives and political views during the officials’ visits to their homes. A Xinjiang government statement available online in 2018 indicated officials had to inspect the homes in which they were staying for any religious elements or symbols, and the statement instructed officials to confiscate such items if found.

Government demolition of mosques continued under a campaign called “Mosque Rectification” that began in 2016. Based on analysis of satellite imagery, ASPI, in its September 2020 report entitled *Tracing the Destruction of Uyghur and Islamic Spaces in Xinjiang*, estimated approximately 16,000 mosques in Xinjiang (65 percent of total mosques) had been destroyed or damaged as a result of government policies; the majority of the destruction took place since 2017. According to the report, authorities had demolished an estimated 8,500 outright, with satellite images showing vacant land where they previously stood. Approximately 7,500 had sustained damage. The government had demolished a further 30 percent of important Islamic sacred sites, including shrines, cemeteries, and pilgrimage routes, across the region, mostly since 2017, and damaged or altered in some way an additional 28 percent. ASPI stated, “The Chinese government’s destruction of cultural heritage aims to erase, replace and rewrite what it means to be Uyghur.” According to the *Wall Street Journal*, in response to the report, the PRC Foreign Ministry said there were 24,000 mosques in the region.

In April, the *Global Times*, a CCP-owned newspaper, quoted a spokesperson for the Xinjiang government’s Information Office who stated, “There’s no so-called forced demolition of mosques problem in Xinjiang.” He stated the government was reconstructing or repairing mosques for the safety of worshipers. In May,

Reuters reported officials in Xinjiang and Beijing denied that any religious sites in the region had been forcibly destroyed or restricted; the officials said some mosques were demolished while others were upgraded and expanded as part of “rural revitalization.” The report said journalists visited the region where they observed signs outside mosques stating local Muslims needed to register to enter the mosque, and officials banned citizens from outside the area, foreigners, and persons younger than the age of 18 from entry. Functioning mosques featured surveillance cameras and included Chinese flags and propaganda displays declaring loyalty to the CCP. During a series of visits to the region during the year, eyewitnesses observed most mosques were closed throughout the day. Local officials claimed these mosques were closed due to COVID-19 protocols, despite the region’s reporting very low numbers of new cases during the year.

There were reports that authorities continued to remove Islamic features from mosques, minarets, and domes throughout the region. In May, Reuters reported the Jiaman Mosque in Qira City, Hotan Prefecture, was “hidden behind high walls and Communist Party propaganda signs, leaving passersby with no indication that it is home to a religious site.”

In September, the *Telegraph* reported the government had given permission for an international hotel chain to build a hotel on the site of a former mosque in Hotan Prefecture that was destroyed in 2018.

In April, RFA reported that Xinjiang authorities had leased a mosque in Ghulja City, Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, to an ethnic Han businessman for use as tourist hotel. The report said videos and photographs showed ethnic Han individuals drinking tea and performing Uyghur-style folk dances alongside ethnic Uyghur dancers in the prayer hall of the mosque, which a Uyghur former detainee identified from the videos as the Uzbek Mosque. According to RFA, these videos caused outrage online among the Uyghur diaspora.

In March, the Catholic news outlet AsiaNews reported that authorities did not demolish the Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Ghulja City, Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, in February as planned; however, churchgoers were unable to use the building because, in preparation for demolition, authorities removed all furnishings and cut off electricity, water, and other services. Authorities ordered the demolition of the Sacred Heart Church despite the congregation’s having all legal permits to operate. Reportedly, one of the original reasons authorities gave for demolishing the church was that it was “too visible” along a road that leads from the city to the airport in an area slated for commercial

development. According to AsiaNews, in recent years authorities destroyed at least four other churches that had legal permits so they could convert the land the churches were built on to commercial purposes: one each in Hami (Kumul) Prefecture and Kuitun City, Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, and two in Tacheng Prefecture. AsiaNews stated all the churches had permits, but they were demolished, and the state paid no compensation, contrary to law.

The government continued to enforce laws prohibiting children younger than 18 from taking part in religious observances and traditions. Uyghurs and other Muslim ethnic minorities remained strictly prohibited by law from providing their children with any religious education at home, and children younger than 18 were prohibited from entering mosques and fasting during the month of Ramadan. In May, an imam living in exile told the *Christian Science Monitor* the ban on religious education for children meant a significant part of Uyghur culture would disappear. “The next generation will accept the Chinese mindset,” he said. “They’ll still be called Uyghurs, but their mindset and values will be gone.”

Numerous media reports indicated the government continued to operate a network of boarding schools for ethnic minority children whose parents had been detained in Xinjiang’s internment camp systems. In 2020, a research study published online on parent-child separation in Yarkand County, Kashgar Prefecture, analyzed data from government spreadsheets not previously available. According to the study, government statistics showed that between 2017 and 2019, the number of boarding students in primary and middle schools (grades one to nine) increased by 76.9 percent, from 497,800 to 880,500. The data indicated that 53.1 percent of all students in Yarkand lived in boarding facilities. Government records showed that among a subset of 10,000 children with at least one parent in custody, there were more than 1,000 children who had both parents interned. Nearly all of the children were Uyghur, apart from 11 who were of Kazakh and Tajik ethnicity. No ethnic Han child had a parent in custody.

According to a March *Forbes* report, the government issued a document that stated, “The CCP set a 2020 goal of running one to two such boarding schools in each of XUAR’s over 800 townships.” Government documents indicated that the proliferation of these state-run institutions was specifically intended for children of parents detained in internment camps or relocated under forced labor schemes. Children in these schools studied ethnic Han culture, Mandarin, and CCP ideology. In its November report, the USHMM stated, “Parents and other family members serving as children’s guardians indicated that they were threatened with being sent to detention centers if they resisted the removal of their children and their transfer

to these schools. While held there, the children are prevented from practicing their Muslim faith, and are forbidden to use their own language, forcing them to learn Mandarin, thereby erasing the practice of Uyghur culture and religion in the community's younger generations.”

RFA reported that in September, state media announced the launch of the “Pomegranate Flower” policy. The program assigned Han children from across the country as “relatives” to Uyghur toddlers and young children, with the intention that the Han children would maintain contact with the Uyghur children by phone and in visits to the XUAR. RFA stated the program reflected the government’s slogan that all ethnic groups in the country must “hug each other tightly like pomegranate seeds” to achieve a Chinese nationality that transcends ethnicity. Uyghur activists and analysts criticized the program as forced assimilation. One analyst said, “These children are still in their own homeland, but [the state is attempting to] assimilate them, to eliminate their language, their culture.” RFA stated that according to a report published on September 11 on the XUAR government-run *Tianshan* website, in one week, nearly 40 toddlers and primary school pupils in one Kashgar Prefecture village, including one-year-old Mahliya Mahmut, were matched with 36 pairs of Pomegranate Flower “relatives” from 30 cities across 13 provinces, regions, and municipalities in the country.

On February 11, *Bitter Winter* published an analysis of the SARA’s “Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy,” which entered into force on May 1. According to *Bitter Winter*, registration in the government database of government-approved clergy in the country was “complicated.” Individuals who were not listed in the database but claimed to be clergy would be committing a crime. Individuals unable to obtain a “clergy card” would include anyone not belonging to one of the five officially recognized patriotic religious associations, including the Islamic Association of China. *Bitter Winter* stated individuals had to prove they “support[ed] the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and support[ed] the socialist system.” According to *Bitter Winter*, the regulations created “an “Orwellian system of surveillance, and strengthen[ed] the already strict control on all clergy.”

According to an AP journalist who visited the Xinjiang Islamic Institute in October, textbooks in the government-run school for imams were written in Chinese rather than Arabic. Textbooks encouraged students to learn Mandarin. One lesson stated, “We must be grateful to the Party and the government for creating peace” and another stated, “We must strive to build a socialist Xinjiang with Chinese characteristics. Amen!”

International media and NGOs reported PRC authorities or their representatives continued to pressure Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and other Muslims from Xinjiang living abroad to spy on fellow expatriates. They pressured individuals to return to China and/or cease advocacy on behalf of residents of Xinjiang, and threatened retaliation against family members still in Xinjiang if the individuals did not comply. The Karakax List, a set of PRC government documents originally leaked in 2019 that described the systematic targeting and imprisonment of Muslim populations in Karakax (alternate Uyghur spelling: Qaraqash, Mandarin spelling: Moyu) County, Hotan Prefecture, contained personal data on more than 300 Uyghurs living abroad.

International media reported the PRC put pressure on foreign governments to deport Uyghur refugees back to China. In June, UHRP published a report entitled *No Space Left to Run: China's Transnational Repression of Uyghurs* that found that since 1997, more than 1,151 cases of Uyghurs being detained and 395 cases of Uyghurs being deported in 28 countries had occurred.

U.S. News and World Report reported that the Moroccan Court of Cassation ruled on December 16 to refoul Turkey-based Uyghur activist Yidiresi Aishan (also known as Idris Hasan) from Morocco to China. Aishan, originally from Xinjiang, fled to Turkey in 2012 after authorities increasingly harassed him. In Turkey, he was known for advocating for the rights of Uyghurs in the PRC. According to media reports, Moroccan authorities detained Aishan at the airport in Casablanca after he arrived from Turkey in July because of a PRC-filed 2017 Interpol red notice identifying him as “a terrorist.” In August, Interpol cancelled the red notice on the grounds that it violated articles of Interpol’s constitution and was “of a political, military, religious, or racial character.” A panel of experts in the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and international NGOs advocated for Aishan’s release. The UN panel said in a statement that if returned, Aishan “risks serious human rights violations including arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, or torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” On December 20, the Committee Against Torture, a UN-linked body of experts that monitors implementation of the UN Convention against Torture, issued interim measures, requesting Aishan not be extradited under Morocco’s bilateral extradition treaty with the PRC until a complaint regarding his case had been fully examined. At year’s end, Aishan remained in Morocco and international organizations continued to call on the Moroccan government to not send him to China.

UHRP reported in February that since 2019, Xinjiang authorities used “proof of life” videos to pressure overseas Uyghurs into silencing their criticism of abuses taking place in the region. These videos took many different forms, but generally authorities posted videos of family members in Xinjiang stating they were alive and doing well, free to experience their culture and practice their religion, or denouncing their Uyghur relatives overseas for being critical of the PRC. An author of the UHRP report wrote in a February edition of the Hong Kong Free Press that “these pleas have a sinister implication for Uyghurs who know their families are in danger.”

The International Federation of Journalists reported that on April 9, authorities broadcast a video featuring Uyghur TV producer Erkin Tursun making a “confession” and calling on his son, who lives abroad and advocates for Tursun’s freedom, to return to China. Detained by authorities since 2018, at year’s end Tursun was serving a 20-year sentence on charges of “inciting ethnic hatred, ethnic discrimination and covering up crimes.” Erkin’s son said his mother, once detained in 2017, was forced “to speak against me” on a similar propaganda video two years prior.

According to the UHRP report *No Space Left to Run*, since 2017, China’s transnational repression of Uyghurs had “accelerated dramatically.” Repression included intimidation on social media apps, deployment of malware, and threatening or intimidating telephone calls from PRC government officials. Some individuals reported receiving demands to spy on their diaspora community on behalf of the PRC government, backed up by threats and intimidation. UHRP said, “Unreported cases would likely raise these figures substantially, with our database presenting just the tip of the iceberg due to our reliance on publicly reported instances of repression.”

In March, RFA reported a Chinese hacking group called “Evil Eye” was sending links to Uyghurs living abroad, often links to news articles or other items of special interest to their targets, which, when clicked on, allowed the hackers to install malware on their targets’ devices, particularly their mobile telephones. Hackers were then able to monitor their targets’ activity, passwords, and even their physical location. This hacking could also enable authorities to monitor and arrest the individuals’ contacts living in Xinjiang. Facebook reportedly stated it was taking measures to shut down the hacking group’s ability to distribute malware through its products.

In August, UHRP released a report entitled “*Nets Cast from the Earth to the Sky*”: *China’s Hunt for Pakistan’s Uyghurs*. According to UHRP, one Pakistani gemstone trader from Gilgit-Baltistan, who was married to a Uyghur woman, was denied entry into the XUAR unless he brought his wife with him. After the trader complied and returned to the border with his wife, Xinjiang authorities detained and later incarcerated her. The report included several cases in which PRC authorities detained women married to Pakistani men who were living in Xinjiang.

In August, RFA reported that PRC authorities arrested the relatives of ethnic Uyghurs living overseas, including in the United States, who spoke out against human rights abuses in Xinjiang. One Uyghur activist living in the United States told RFA that ever since she began searching for her sister, authorities had increasingly interrogated and harassed her family. Authorities had also begun to pressure the woman directly to stop her advocacy for her sister, whom the government sentenced sometime after 2017 to 17 years in prison for observing religious rites following the death of their father and for keeping religious books in her possession. The activist said the government treated families of Uyghurs living abroad as “hostages.”

In November, UHRP published a report entitled “*Your Family Will Suffer*”: *How China is Hacking, Surveilling, and Intimidating Uyghurs in Liberal Democracies* that described the PRC’s efforts to hack, harass, and intimidate Uyghurs living abroad. According to a UHRP survey of Uyghurs living abroad, 95.8 percent of the 72 respondents reported feeling threatened and 73.5 percent reported experiencing “digital risks, threats, or other forms of online harassment.”

In November, HRW reported that starting in October 2016, government authorities began confiscating the passports of XUAR residents for “collective management” or “collective safekeeping” amid what the government described as the rising threat of terrorism. The World Uyghur Congress said that although the measures were ostensibly aimed at all residents of Xinjiang, they effectively targeted the Uyghur community. Government officials continued to exert strict control over the ability of Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities to travel abroad. There were additional reports PRC embassies and consulates continued to refuse to renew passports for Uyghurs living abroad. Instead, PRC officials reportedly destroyed their passports and replaced them with one-way travel documents to the PRC in order to force their return.

Advocacy groups, analysts, and media reported the government continued a sustained propaganda campaign launched in late 2020 attempting to counter

evidence and international criticism of human rights abuses in the region. In total, the XUAR government, often hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, held 59 Xinjiang-related press conferences by year's end. XUAR spokesperson Xu led these press conferences and often invited scholars from universities in Xinjiang to present arguments that Xinjiang was a "beautiful place." In February, spokesperson Xu said, "We welcome foreigners from all fields, including relevant officials of the new U.S. administration, to take a walk and have a look in Xinjiang, so as to understand the real situation of Xinjiang, so as not to be blinded by [the U.S. Secretary of State's] lies. But we also have a bottom line of principle, and we will never accept any so-called 'investigation' of presumption of guilt."

In January, XUAR spokesperson Xu denied that the government forced birth control measures, including IUD insertions, tubal ligations, and abortions, on women in Xinjiang. Xu stated, "The growth rate of the Uyghur population is not only higher than that of the whole Xinjiang population, but also higher than that of the minority population, and more significantly higher than that of the (Chinese majority) Han population."

In January, the PRC embassy in Washington, D.C. posted a statement on Twitter that read, "Study shows that in the process of eradicating extremism, the minds of Uyghur women in Xinjiang were emancipated and gender equality and reproductive health were promoted, making them no longer baby-making machines. They are more confident and independent." Days later, Twitter locked the embassy's account, "for violating our policy against dehumanization." The account remained suspended at year's end.

In February, RFA reported that authorities had released a video purporting to show Habibulla Abdurehim, an imam of a mosque in Hotan Prefecture, refuting the U.S. government's determination that the PRC government was committing genocide against ethnic minorities in Xinjiang and saying that the government recently renovated his mosque. A local source told RFA that Abdurehim was not an imam but a former party secretary of Yawa township in Hotan Prefecture, and RFA contacted the police department in Yawa to confirm the source's information. The officer who answered said he was unsure whether Abdurehim was a religious figure or party secretary, but that 50 to 60 of the 70 to 80 religious leaders in Yawa were imprisoned.

In December, ASPI published evidence that the CCP used foreign social media influencers to "shape and push" its propaganda about Xinjiang. ASPI collected data from January 2020-August 2021 that showed foreign social media influencers

created content on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and other social media platforms to be amplified on PRC-operated news websites. The report stated, “By leveraging the popularity of foreign media influencers in China, the Chinese state propaganda apparatus can package their messages through potentially more persuasive voices in an attempt to neutralize critical reporting about human rights abuses in Xinjiang and depict a more positive image of the region.”

UHRP published a study in December entitled *Meet the “New” Uyghurs: CGTN’s Role in Mediawashing Genocide* that examined 307 articles and videos propagated by the state-owned international media organization China Global Television Network (CGTN) between 2017-2020 about “reeducated” Uyghurs being “thankful,” designed to counter international criticism of human rights abuses taking place in Xinjiang. The study stated CGTN’s goal was to present a narrative that PRC policies in Xinjiang had successfully “transformed Uyghurs from ‘extremists’ to state-compliant, economically productive individuals.”

On March 29, following the announcement that the European Union, United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States had sanctioned officials over human rights abuses in Xinjiang, the PRC held a press conference to address the protection of human rights in Xinjiang, ethnic minority culture, freedom of religious belief, and labor and employment. Spokesperson Xu said, “Xinjiang has gotten rid of terrorism and extreme poverty.... Now that Xinjiang had achieved stability and prosperity, and people’s lives are stable and peaceful, the anti-China forces in the United States and the West are not able to achieve their ulterior goals and are very restless, so they try to blame Xinjiang and lie with their eyes open.”

In May, AP reported that during a government reception in Beijing held on Eid al-Fitr, several Muslim leaders from Xinjiang spoke, rejecting accusations that the government was suppressing the religious freedom of Muslims in the region. Abdureqip Tomurniyaz, head of the Xinjiang Islamic Association and the School for Islamic Studies in Xinjiang, said of Western nations, “They want to sabotage Xinjiang’s harmony and stability, contain China’s rise, and alienate relations between China and Islamic countries[.]” Religious leaders from five mosques also spoke at the conference. Mamat Juma, imam of the Id Kah Mosque in Kashgar, stated all ethnic groups in Xinjiang approved of government actions to combat terrorism in the region. He said people were grateful to the ruling Communist Party for restoring stability and promoting economic growth.

In May, AP reported that Chinese state media released dozens of videos showing Uyghurs angrily denouncing the U.S. government’s declaration that the PRC

government was committing genocide in Xinjiang. PRC officials said these videos were recorded solely by Uyghurs and were “spontaneous outpourings of emotion.” AP reported it had obtained proof the government had commissioned the videos and had ordered officials in Xinjiang to find Uyghurs fluent in Mandarin and ensure they included certain talking points in their one-minute videos. Tahir Imin, a Uyghur activist who fled China in 2017, said the videos were almost certainly government-orchestrated and that, since information in Xinjiang was heavily censored, it was highly unlikely Uyghurs in the region would be aware of the U.S. government declaration.

In June, RFA reported Xinjiang government officials held a news conference in which they presented relatives of ethnic Uyghurs who spoke about human rights violations committed in Xinjiang at the “Uyghur Tribunal” in London. Those who spoke at the Xinjiang government conference refuted the statements their relatives made at the London tribunal. Spokesperson Xu said individuals who testified at the tribunal were actors who “make a living by smearing Xinjiang abroad” in exchange for refugee and other benefits. Members of the tribunal later invited Xu to send the news conference participants to the tribunal’s next meeting to freely testify. In a statement, Dolkun Isa, president of the World Uyghur Congress, stated, “There’s no doubt these family members are being held hostage and were forced to say what they were told against their loved ones by the authorities[.]”

In July, local media reported spokesperson Xu held a press conference following the U.S. government’s announcement to impose trade restrictions on several Chinese solar panel production companies for using forced labor in Xinjiang. Xu said, “We have stated many times that Xinjiang-related issues are not human rights, ethnic, or religious issues at all, but are antiviolenace, de-radicalization, and antiseperatism issues... Xinjiang has never been afraid of sanctions. All sanctions are a piece of waste paper.” During the press conference, he also said U.S. sanctions were “self-serving” for U.S. industries and would only harm U.S. interests.

During the year, the State Council Information Office (SCIO) released two white papers on Xinjiang. In July, SCIO issued the *Respecting and Protecting the Rights of All Ethnic Groups in Xinjiang* white paper, which stated the government upheld “respect for and protection of freedom of religious belief in Xinjiang.” In September, SCIO released the *Xinjiang Population Dynamics and Data* white paper, which stated, “Xinjiang’s evolving demographics are a natural result of local economic and social development, and of industrialization and modernization.”

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

Because the government and individuals closely linked religion, culture, and ethnicity, it was difficult to categorize many incidents of societal discrimination as being solely based on religious identity. Local sources stated unequal treatment of Uyghurs and Han Chinese continued in parallel with official suppression of Uyghur language, culture, and religion, and promotion of the Han majority in political, economic, and cultural life. Muslims in Xinjiang faced discrimination in hiring and in retaining their positions, and in pursuing other business opportunities. Local sources stated it was difficult for Uyghurs to book hotel reservations for travel.

According to an AP journalist who visited the region in October, although Han Chinese and Uyghurs lived side by side, there was “an unspoken but palpable gulf between them.” While the Uyghur language was widely spoken, public signage in some urban neighborhoods was only in Mandarin. Han Chinese enjoyed freedom of movement not available to Uyghurs. In bookstores, Uyghur language materials were available but labeled “ethnic minority language books.” Manifestations of Uyghur culture, such as song, dance, and clothing, were packaged as tourist items for visiting Han Chinese in what one Western scholar referred to as the “museumification” of Uyghur culture. The journalist saw signs in Mandarin promoting Lunar New Year, a holiday Uyghur Muslims did not traditionally celebrate.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

In July, the Secretary of State met virtually with Uyghur family members, Xinjiang internment camp survivors, and advocates to express the U.S. commitment to calling for the government to end atrocities in Xinjiang. Embassy officials routinely raised concerns about the treatment, and advocated for the human rights, of Uyghur Muslims and members of other Muslim and non-Muslim minority groups in Xinjiang with national and regional government officials. Embassy staff visited the region during the year, although at a reduced rate compared with previous years due to COVID-19 restrictions. When the region was not under travel restrictions, embassy staff could travel there without requesting prior permission, but local governments denied or impeded access to schools, “reeducation camps,” and residences.

During the year, the U.S. government used a variety of diplomatic and economic tools to promote religious freedom and accountability in Xinjiang, including

sanctions, visa restrictions, controls on exports and imports, and an updated business advisory raising awareness among U.S.-based companies about the risks of doing business in Xinjiang.

On January 19, the then Secretary of State publicly announced a determination that since at least March 2017, the PRC has committed crimes against humanity and genocide against Uyghurs, who are predominantly Muslim, and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang.

On February 16 during a CNN townhall, the President said the United States would continue to speak out against human rights abuses China perpetrated against, among others, Uyghurs.

During testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on March 10, the Secretary of State called on the PRC to allow the international community, including the United Nations, access to Xinjiang to confirm the government's claims it was committing no wrongdoing in the region. While speaking of the PRC's treatment of Uyghurs, he said, "We've been clear, and I've been clear, that I see it as genocide, [and] other egregious abuses of human rights, and we'll continue to make that clear."

On June 22, the United States joined a group of 44 countries in issuing a Canada-led joint statement expressing grave concern about the human rights situation in Xinjiang, as well as deep concern about the deterioration of fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong and the human rights situation in Tibet. On October 21, the United States joined a group of 43 countries in issuing a France-led joint statement on the human rights situation in Xinjiang. The statement read, in part, "Credible-based reports indicate the existence of a large network of 'political re-education' camps where over a million people have been arbitrarily detained. We have seen an increasing number of reports of widespread and systematic human rights violations, including reports documenting torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, forced sterilization, sexual and gender-based violence, and forced separation of children. There are severe restrictions on freedom of religion or belief and the freedoms of movement, association and expression as well as on Uyghur culture. Widespread surveillance disproportionately continues to target Uyghurs and members of other minorities."

The embassy continued to amplify Department of State religious freedom initiatives directly to local audiences through postings to the embassy website and to its Weibo, WeChat, and Twitter accounts. The embassy also posted or

retweeted a series of posts concerning repression of religious freedom in Xinjiang. For example, in March, the embassy posted the Secretary's remarks to PRC State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, noting that the Secretary "raised concerns about a range of PRC actions that undermined the international rules-based order and that run counter to our values and interests and those of our partners, including actions related to human rights, Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, the East and South China Seas, and Taiwan." Following the November virtual meeting between the U.S. and Chinese presidents, the embassy posted on WeChat and Weibo, "President Biden raised concerns about the PRC's practices in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong, as well as human rights more broadly." On December 17, the embassy reposted the Secretary of State's tweet: "We are holding to account PRC tech entities that actively support surveillance and tracking of ethnic and religious minorities in the PRC, predominantly Muslim Uyghurs in Xinjiang." On December 24, when the President signed the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act "to ensure that goods made with forced labor in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the [PRC] do not enter the United States market," the embassy posted, "President Biden [at]POTUS: Today (December 24), I signed the 'Prevention of Forced Uyghur Labor Law,' which is supported by both parties. The United States will continue to use all the tools at our disposal to ensure that the supply chain does not use forced labor – including forced labor from Xinjiang and other parts of China." Almost 10 million social media users viewed these social media posts, and almost 240,000 engaged with them, participating in online discussions with embassy staff and with each other. The tone of the comments from Chinese social media users was largely critical of embassy posts, especially concerning Xinjiang and Tibet issues, yet the coverage presented the U.S. perspective to a wide Chinese audience.

## HONG KONG 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

### Executive Summary

The Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), as well as other laws and policies, state that residents have freedom of conscience, freedom of religious belief, and freedom to preach, conduct, and participate in religious activities in public. The Bill of Rights Ordinance incorporates the religious freedom protections of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). In 2020, the People's Republic of China (PRC) imposed a broad National Security Law (NSL) for the SAR with the stated aim of combating secession, subversion, terrorism, and collusion with foreign powers. The Falun Dafa Association and some churches active in the prodemocracy movement said the government had grown less tolerant since passage of the NSL. Other religious leaders and advocates stated the NSL did not impair their ability to conduct or attend worship services in conformity with their religious norms; however, they continued to express concern regarding self-censorship and potential PRC targeting of civil society organizations affiliated with religious groups active in the 2019 prodemocracy movement. An unknown assailant physically attacked the head of the Hong Kong Falun Dafa Association, and unknown assailants vandalized and destroyed printing presses at the contracted printer's facility of the Falun Gong-affiliated publication *Epoch Times*. On April 2 and April 3, masked individuals wielding knives and spray paint destroyed eight Falun Gong public information displays in what the group said appeared to be coordinated attacks across several locations. In April, Lo Hing-choi, president of the Baptist Convention and a critic of the NSL, resigned and moved abroad, saying he feared government retaliation if he remained in Hong Kong. In May, the Good Neighbor North District Church, which had supported the prodemocracy movement, ceased operations. There were reports of emigration of other religious leaders. Media reported that on October 31, bishops and religious leaders from mainland China briefed Hong Kong Catholic clergymen on the PRC central government's policy of "Sinicizing" Christianity. Authorities curtailed activities of Falun Gong practitioners during the year, banning their street kiosks under what practitioners said was a pretext of violating COVID-19 protocols. In July, several members of the SAR Legislative Council urged the SAR government to outlaw the Falun Dafa Association under the NSL. In September, an editorial in the PRC-owned media outlet *Wen Wei Po* called on SAR authorities to ban "cult organizations," a term the PRC government has historically used to refer to Falun Gong, among other groups. In April, *Wen Wei Po* reported that national security police blocked access to the website of the

Taiwan Presbyterian Church for internet users in Hong Kong due to “national security” concerns.

In June, an unknown group hung banners defaming Cardinal Joseph Zen, an outspoken critic of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Catholic Church policy on China, around each of the seven Catholic churches that were planning to hold a memorial Mass for the victims of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing. On May 17, Pope Francis named Reverend Stephen Chow Sau-Yan Bishop of Hong Kong. The Vatican-affiliated outlet *AsiaNews* stated Chow was a “balanced” choice between prodemocracy and pro-Beijing camps. Observers reported Christian churches in Hong Kong continued to provide spiritual and monetary support to underground churches in mainland China.

The U.S. Consul General and staff repeatedly raised concerns regarding the shrinking space for civil society, including religious groups, during meetings with a range of official counterparts in which they also affirmed U.S. government support for protecting freedom of religion and belief. U.S. officials delivered similar messages to religious leaders, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and community representatives, as well as in public messages.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 7.3 million (midyear 2021). According to SAR government statistics, there are more than one million followers of Taoism and approximately one million followers of Buddhism; 800,000 Protestants; 404,000 Catholics; 300,000 Muslims; 100,000 Hindus; and 12,000 Sikhs. The Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, which recognizes the Pope and maintains links to the Vatican, reported approximately 621,000 followers (404,000 local residents and 217,000 residents with other nationalities). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reported it has approximately 25,100 members. According to the World Jewish Congress, there are approximately 2,500 Jews, primarily expatriates. Small communities of Baha’is and Zoroastrians also reside in the SAR. Confucianism is widespread, and in some cases, elements of Confucianism are practiced in conjunction with other belief systems. The Falun Dafa Association estimates there are approximately 500 Falun Gong practitioners.

There are numerous Protestant denominations, including Baptist, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Lutheran, Methodist, Anglican, the Church of Christ in China, Seventh-day Adventist, and Pentecostal.

## Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

### Legal Framework

The Basic Law states residents have freedom of conscience, freedom of religious belief, and freedom to preach, conduct, and participate in religious activities in public. The Basic Law also states the government may not interfere in the internal affairs of religious organizations or restrict religious activities that do not contravene other laws. The Basic Law calls for ties between the region's religious groups and their counterparts in mainland China based on "nonsubordination, noninterference, and mutual respect." The Basic Law states that religious organizations "may maintain and develop their relations with religious organizations and believers elsewhere."

The Bill of Rights Ordinance incorporates the religious freedom protections of the ICCPR, which include the right to manifest religious belief individually or in community with others, in public or private, and through worship, observance, practice, and teaching. The Bill of Rights Ordinance states persons belonging to ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities have the right to enjoy their own culture, profess and practice their own religion, and use their own language. The ordinance also protects the right of parents or legal guardians to "ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions." These rights may be limited when an emergency is proclaimed and the "manifestation" of religious beliefs may be limited by law when necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals, or the rights of others. If a state of emergency is proclaimed, the rights may not be limited based solely on religion.

In 2020, the PRC National People's Congress (NPC) imposed the NSL for Hong Kong. The law prohibits secession, subversion, terrorism, and "collusion with a foreign country or with external elements to endanger national security." The law states that it shall override local laws if there are inconsistencies. The NSL states power to interpret the law lies with the NPC Standing Committee, not local courts.

PRC State Administration for Religious Affairs regulations entitled "Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy," which came into force in mainland China on May 1, which require clergy to pledge allegiance to the CCP and promote the "Sinicization of religion," do not apply to Hong Kong.

Religious groups are not legally required to register with the government. They must, however, register to receive government benefits such as tax-exempt status,

rent subsidies, government or other professional development training, use of government facilities, or a grant to provide social services. To qualify for such benefits, a group must prove to the satisfaction of the government that it is established solely for religious, charitable, social, or recreational reasons. Registrants must provide the name and purpose of the organization, identify its office holders, and confirm the address of the principal place of business and any other premises owned or occupied by the organization. If a religious group registers with the government, it enters the registry of all NGOs, but the government makes no adjudication on the validity of any registered groups. Religious groups may register as a society, a tax-exempt organization, or both, provided they have at least three members who hold valid SAR identity documents; the registration process normally takes approximately 12 working days. The Falun Dafa Association is registered as a society rather than a religious group; as a society, it may establish offices, collect dues from members, and have legal status.

The Basic Law allows private schools to provide religious education. The government offers subsidies to schools that are built and run by religious groups. Government-subsidized schools must adhere to government curriculum standards and may not bar students based on religion, but they may provide nonmandatory religious instruction as part of their curriculum. Teachers may not discriminate against students because of their religious beliefs. The government curriculum mandates coursework on ethics and religious studies, with a focus on religious tolerance; it also includes elective modules on different world religions.

The NSL stipulates the SAR “shall take necessary measures to strengthen public communication, guidance, supervision and regulation over matters concerning national security, including those relating to schools, universities, social organizations, the media, and the internet.” Pursuant to the NSL, the Education Bureau issued new guidelines on February 4 to incorporate lessons on “national security” into the government curriculum, beginning at the kindergarten level. All schools following the Education Bureau curriculum, including those run by religious groups, must incorporate this material. Private and international schools that do not receive funding from SAR authorities, including those run by religious groups, are not required to follow the new guidelines, but the guidelines state that these schools have the “responsibility to help their students . . . acquire a correct and objective understanding and apprehension of the concept of national security and the National Security Law.”

Religious groups may apply to the government to lease land on concessional terms through Home Affairs Bureau sponsorship. Religious groups may apply to develop or use facilities in accordance with local legislation.

The Chinese Temples Committee, led by the Secretary for Home Affairs, has a direct role in managing the affairs of some temples. The SAR chief executive appoints its members. The committee oversees the management and logistical operations of 24 of the region's 600 temples and gives grants to other charitable organizations. The committee provides grants to the Home Affairs Bureau for disbursement in the form of financial assistance to needy ethnic Chinese citizens. A colonial-era law does not require new temples to register to be eligible for Temples Committee assistance.

In March, the PRC NPC Standing Committee imposed new measures to amend Hong Kong's electoral system. Hong Kong's majority pro-Beijing legislature passed a bill in May incorporating these measures into local legislation. The new electoral system creates a nomination and vetting system for all candidates for political office that Beijing and Hong Kong authorities described as designed to ensure that only "patriots" govern Hong Kong. Hong Kong voters directly elect 20 of the Legislative Council's newly expanded 90 seats. Forty of the seats are elected by the Chief Executive Election Committee (CEEC) directly, while 30 are selected as representatives of "functional constituencies" from various economic and social sectors. The CEEC comprises 1,500 members from five sectors. The religious subsector, under the third sector ("Grassroots, labor, religious, and other"), is composed of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, Chinese Muslim Cultural and Fraternal Association, Hong Kong Christian Council, Hong Kong Taoist Association, Confucian Academy, and Hong Kong Buddhist Association. These six bodies are each entitled to 10 of the 60 seats for the religious subsector on the CEEC. The religious subsector is not required to hold elections under the Chief Executive Election Ordinance. Instead, each religious organization selects its electors in its own fashion. Each of the six designated religious groups is also a member of the Hong Kong Colloquium of Religious Leaders.

### **Government Practices**

The Falun Dafa Association and some churches active in the prodemocracy movement stated the government had grown less tolerant since passage of the NSL. For example, Falun Gong practitioners reported that SAR authorities shut down their public information kiosks on May 27 and 28 on what practitioners said was the pretext of violating COVID-19 prevention rules under Food and

Environmental Hygiene ordinances. Other religious leaders and advocates stated the NSL did not impair freedom to conduct or attend worship services, although they continued to express concerns regarding self-censorship and potential PRC targeting of civil society organizations affiliated with religious groups active in the 2019 prodemocracy movement. Archbishop Andrew Chan, the head of the Hong Kong Anglican Church, stated that all religious activities continued to be organized and carried out “as normal” but said preachers were “very cautious to use sensitive terminologies in their homilies.”

Some religious leaders and activists said they were concerned SAR and PRC authorities could target religiously affiliated groups using tactics they repeatedly applied to associations or groups affiliated with the prodemocracy movement. SAR authorities began investigations into and cut existing government ties with civil society groups, pressuring these groups into disbanding. Even after threatened groups disbanded, SAR authorities publicly stated that individuals associated with these groups could face further investigations or arrests. Observers stated these government actions had set numerous legal precedents that undermined fundamental freedoms guaranteed under the Basic Law, including freedom of religion.

During the year, Falun Gong practitioners reported that unknown individuals for months surveilled Sarah Liang, head of the Hong Kong Falun Dafa Association, and a journalist with the Falun Gong-affiliated publication *Epoch Times*. On May 11, an unidentified man struck Liang more than 10 times with a baseball bat, bruising her legs. June Guo, director of the Hong Kong edition of the *Epoch Times*, said the CCP was behind the assault on Liang.

The *Epoch Times* reported that on April 12, unknown assailants vandalized and destroyed printing presses at its contracted printer, forcing the facility to suspend operations for several days. Guo stated the safety of the staff at the outlet’s printing plant was a continuing concern. Falun Gong practitioners reported that no one had been prosecuted for the attacks as of year’s end.

The Falun Dafa Infocenter reported that on April 2 and April 3, masked individuals wielding knives and spray paint destroyed eight Falun Gong public information displays in what the group said appeared to be coordinated attacks across several locations. At one location, an assailant pushed a volunteer to the ground. Practitioners said they believed the attacks were instigated by pro-CCP groups. The Falun Dafa Infocenter spokesperson said, “These violent acts against a religious minority that unfolded in broad daylight on Hong Kong’s streets are a

clear indication that basic freedoms, and even the rule of law, are indeed in jeopardy in Hong Kong.”

In August, an unknown group falsely claiming to represent the Falun Dafa Association posted on social media that the group would leave Hong Kong. The Falun Dafa Association stated it had no plans to leave the city.

Media reported that Baptist pastor Lo Hing-choi, president of the Baptist Convention since May 2018, resigned and moved abroad in April. According to media, Lo led the Baptist Convention to publicly campaign against the Hong Kong government’s extradition law, and Lo also personally criticized the NSL in June 2020. In 2019, he openly supported prodemocracy protests, writing articles comparing protesters to Jews facing persecution in the Old Testament. In July and September 2020, pro-Beijing newspapers such as *Ta Kung Pao* publicly criticized Lo, reportedly causing him to fear repercussions under the NSL if he remained in Hong Kong.

In May, the Good Neighbor North District Church ceased operations. Hong Kong police had launched an investigation into the church in December 2020 for alleged money laundering and fraud, arrested two individuals affiliated with the church, and ordered a freeze of the church’s bank accounts. The church’s former pastor, Roy Chan, who relocated in 2020 to the United Kingdom, continued to state the investigation was an act of political retaliation because some church members had formed a group called “Safeguard Our Generation” in 2019 in an attempt to deescalate violent clashes between police and prodemocracy protesters. In October, the former pastor said accusations against religious leaders for “inciting subversion” had resulted in self-censorship within local churches and had caused some religious leaders to emigrate.

Reuters reported that on October 31, bishops and religious leaders from mainland China briefed Hong Kong Catholic clergymen on the government’s policy of “Sinicizing” Christianity to bring religious doctrine and practice in line with CCP doctrine. Clerics who attended or had knowledge of the meeting said that while individual meetings with counterparts in mainland China had occurred in the past, this was the first formal meeting, and that PRC central government officials had arranged and monitored it.

In June, SAR authorities denied permission for gatherings to commemorate the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing, including the annual vigil in Hong Kong’s Victoria Park, but they did not interfere with memorial masses held at

seven Catholic churches around the city honoring the victims of the massacre. A spokesperson for the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Diocese, which organized the masses, said that police for the first time questioned the commission about arrangements for the masses and the number of attendees, citing COVID-19 concerns.

Falun Gong practitioners stated they still operated openly and engaged in behavior that remained prohibited in mainland China, including distributing literature, sharing information about the group on social media, and accessing and downloading online materials. No Falun Gong rallies were permitted during the year due to COVID-19 health restrictions, but practitioners continued to publicly gather in small groups, adhering to COVID-19 restrictions. Falun Gong practitioners reported the group gathered in front of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government on July 20 to commemorate the 22nd anniversary of the mass arrest of practitioners in mainland China. Practitioners reported the Hong Kong police instructed them to remove three of their four banners during the event.

Methodist-run Wa Ying College reported difficulties obtaining SAR authorization or funding to renovate school buildings. The *South China Morning Post* reported in May that these difficulties may have stemmed from concerns several legislators had regarding the positions many Methodists and the school allegedly took during the prodemocracy protest movement.

In July, several members of the SAR Legislative Council – including Elizabeth Quat, Wong Kwok-kin, and Holden Chow Ho-ding – urged the SAR government to outlaw the Falun Dafa Association under the NSL. Quat stated the group “aims to subvert state power and should be immediately outlawed,” while Wong called for SAR authorities to freeze the group’s assets. The SAR Security Secretary promised to investigate the group.

On October 7, pro-PRC Hong Kong media HK01 reported that according to a Hong Kong Public Opinion Exchange Association survey conducted between September 1 and October 5 among 8,855 respondents, 72 percent believed Falun Gong was an “anti-China and Hong Kong” organization that violated the NSL and should be banned. At a press conference announcing the survey’s findings, Legislative Council member Eunice Yung stated Falun Gong should be banned in Hong Kong “as soon as possible.” Yung said that Falun Gong had established an “anti-CCP platform” in Hong Kong and called for authorities to investigate the group’s funding sources.

On September 14, an editorial in the PRC-owned media outlet Wen Wei Po identified the Buddhist movement called the True Buddha School as a “cult” and a national security risk. The editorial requested SAR authorities create legislation banning “cult organizations,” a term that the PRC government has historically used to refer to Falun Gong and the True Buddha School, among other groups, “to prevent Hong Kong from becoming a haven for filth.”

In April, Wen Wei Po reported that national security police blocked access to the website of the Taiwan Presbyterian Church for internet users in Hong Kong due to “national security” concerns. A pastor of the Church told Radio Free Asia the interference was done in retaliation for the Church’s support of the 2019 prodemocracy movement in Hong Kong and said, “Blocking the site like this is a warning sign that Beijing is extending more mainland China-style restrictions to Hong Kong.”

In the Legislative Council election in December, Peter Koon, the then secretary general of the Province of the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui (the Anglican Church in Hong Kong), won one of the 40 seats in the Legislative Council elected by the CEEC.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

In June, an unknown group hung banners around each of the seven Catholic churches that were planning to hold a memorial Mass for the victims of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing. The banners contained photographs of Cardinal Joseph Zen, an outspoken critic of the CCP, with the word “devil,” as well as slogans, including “A Cult Has Invaded the Faith” and “Incitement in the Name of Worship.”

Media reported that on May 17, Pope Francis named Reverend Stephen Chow Sau-Yan as the new Bishop of Hong Kong. Chow, head of Hong Kong's Jesuit order, replaced Cardinal John Tong, who had served as interim bishop since 2019. According to one senior cleric, “The security law has made the job a lot more tricky and the pressure is intense.” The Holy See and the PRC do not have formal diplomatic relations, but the 2018 Sino-Vatican agreement reportedly gives both Chinese authorities and the Holy See a role in the process of appointing bishops in mainland China. According to Reuters, Vatican officials said the agreement did not apply to Hong Kong; however, some senior clergy stated the PRC was seeking to extend its control over the Diocese of Hong Kong. The Vatican-affiliated outlet *AsiaNews* stated Chow was a “balanced” choice between prodemocracy and pro-

Beijing camps. On May 18, Chow told media, “Religious freedom is our basic right. We want to really talk to the government not to forget that. It is important to allow religious freedom, matters of faith – not just Catholic – but any religion should be free.”

Observers reported Christian churches in Hong Kong continued to provide underground churches in mainland China with spiritual and monetary support, including Bibles and Christian literature and visits from church members. Some Hong Kong churches reported that they were able to conduct cross-border online services, while others, including the Catholic Church, reported PRC authorities prohibited individuals in mainland China from attending their online services.

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

The Consul General and staff repeatedly raised concerns about the shrinking space for civil society, including religious groups, during meetings with a range of official counterparts, although there is no specific Hong Kong government office that regulates religious behavior. Consulate General Hong Kong officials, including the Consul General, stressed the importance of religious freedom and interfaith dialogue in these meetings with public officials.

Consulate general officials, including the Consul General, also continued to meet with a wide range of religious organizations, including Buddhist, Catholic, Taoist, Jewish, Muslim, Falun Dafa, Sikh, and Protestant religious leaders and adherents, to emphasize the importance of religious freedom and tolerance and to receive reports regarding the status of religious freedom both in Hong Kong and in mainland China. They also met with NGOs and community representatives regarding the same topics.

Throughout the year, consulate general officials promoted respect for religious traditions by marking traditional religious holidays and visiting local Taoist, Confucian, and Buddhist temples and other religious sites. At all these events, consulate general officials stressed in public and private remarks the importance of religious freedom, tolerance, and diversity. Consulate social media posts celebrating International Religious Freedom Day on October 27 and highlighting the Consul General’s visits to religiously affiliated civil society organizations also reflected U.S. government support for the value placed on religious freedom in Hong Kong.

## MACAU 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

### Executive Summary

The Basic Law of the Macau Special Administrative Region (SAR) grants residents freedom of religious belief, freedom to preach and participate in religious activities in public, and freedom to pursue religious education. These rights may be limited in extraordinary situations for national security reasons. The law protects the right of religious assembly and stipulates religious groups may develop and maintain relations with religious groups abroad. Under the Basic Law, the SAR government, rather than the central government of the People's Republic of China (PRC), safeguards religious freedom in the SAR. In June, a group of 25 representatives from various religious groups, accompanied by officials from Beijing's Central Government Liaison Office in Macau, visited Zhejiang Province in mainland China. The office said the visit was designed to maintain good relations between the PRC government and Macau's religious communities. Some religious activists in the diaspora called on the PRC government to allow for greater religious expression in Macau, as provided for by the Basic Law. Some activists on social media criticized the meeting as insincere, stating the PRC has frequently cracked down on religious expression.

In May, a video showing more than 100 primary school students from a prominent Macau Catholic school singing "We Are the Successors of Communism" in front of a Catholic site sparked discussion online on the ability of religious schools to preserve their religious values and implement their educational mission while conforming to government ideology. Falun Gong practitioners reported they continued to be able to discuss their beliefs openly with Macau residents.

In virtual meetings with civil society representatives, religious leaders, and nongovernmental organizations, representatives from the U.S. Consulate General Hong Kong and Macau stressed the importance of religious diversity and religious freedom and discussed religious communities' relations with their coreligionists on the mainland and in Hong Kong.

### Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 630,000 (midyear 2021). According to a 2015 estimate by the research group Association of Religion Data Archives, 48.1 percent of the population are folk religionists, 17.3 percent Buddhist, 11 percent Taoist, 4.5 percent Catholic, 2.5 percent other Christian, 1.2

percent other religious groups (including Hindus, Muslims, and Jews), and 15.4 percent nonreligious. The SAR Government Information Bureau 2021 yearbook states the majority of the population practices Buddhism or Chinese folk religions. The yearbook does not provide an estimate for Buddhists, but it states they are numerous and individuals often practice a mixture of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Chinese folk religions. The SAR Government Information Bureau estimates 4.5 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, of whom almost half are foreign domestic workers and other expatriates, and 2.5 percent of the population is Protestant. Protestant denominations include the Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, and Presbyterian Churches. Evangelical Christian and independent local nondenominational churches, some of which are affiliated with officially recognized mainland churches, are also present. Various reports estimate the Muslim population at 5,000 to 10,000. Smaller religious groups include Baha'is, who estimate their membership at more than 2,000, and Falun Gong practitioners, who estimate their numbers at 20 to 50 persons.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

The Basic Law states residents have freedom of religious belief and the freedom to publicly preach as well as conduct and participate in religious activities. These rights may be limited in extraordinary situations for national security reasons. The Basic Law further stipulates the government shall not interfere in the internal affairs of religious groups or in their relations with their counterparts outside Macau. It bars the government from restricting religious activities that do not contravene the laws of the SAR.

Under the Basic Law, the SAR government, rather than the central government of the PRC, safeguards religious freedom in the SAR.

PRC State Administration for Religious Affairs regulations entitled “Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy,” which came into force on the mainland May 1, requiring clergy to pledge allegiance to the CCP and promote the “Sinicization of religion,” do not apply to Macau.

The law states there is no official religion in the SAR and stipulates all religious denominations are equal before the law. The law provides for freedom of religion, including privacy of religious belief, freedom of religious assembly, freedom to hold religious processions, and freedom of religious education. In 2020, the SAR

enacted bylaws to the 2009 NSL allowing the Judiciary Police to create four new national security branches: the National Security Information Division; the National Security Crime Investigation Division; the National Security Action Support Division; and the National Security Affairs Integrated Service Division, with investigative authority over religious groups and personnel, among others.

Religious groups are not required to register to conduct religious activities, but registration enables them to benefit from legal status. Benefits include exemption from taxation (such as property tax, stamp duty, complementary tax [profit tax], and industrial tax) and receiving financial assistance from the government. Religious groups are required to register with the Identification Bureau, providing the name of an individual applicant and that person's position in the group, identification card number, and contact information, as well as the group's name and a copy of the group's charter. Registered charities receive the same benefits as registered religious groups. Religious groups need to be registered separately as a charity under a similar or different name in order to provide charitable services.

The law states that religious organizations may run seminaries and schools, hospitals, and welfare institutions, and provide other social services.

There is no religious education in public schools. A small number of schools run by religious organizations receive no public funding, and these schools may require students to receive religious education.

By law, religious groups may develop and maintain relations with religious groups abroad.

### **Government Practices**

In June, a group of 25 representatives from various religious groups, accompanied by officials from Beijing's Central Government Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in Macau, visited Zhejiang Province in mainland China. The delegation included representatives of Buddhism, Christianity, Catholicism, Taoism, and the Baha'i Faith. The office stated the goal of the visit was to maintain good relations between the PRC government and Macau's religious communities. Some religious activists in the diaspora community called on the PRC government to allow for greater religious expression in Macau, as provided for by the Basic Law. Some activists on social media criticized the meeting as insincere, stating the PRC has frequently cracked down on religious expression.

Some religious groups continued to report they retained their ability to conduct charitable activities on the mainland by working through official channels and officially recognized churches.

The government continued to provide financial support, regardless of religious affiliation, to religious groups to establish schools, child-care centers, clinics, homes for the elderly, rehabilitation centers, and vocational training centers. The government also continued to refer victims of human trafficking to religious organizations for the provision of support services.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

In May, a video went viral on social media showing more than 100 primary school students from the Catholic Pui Ching Middle School singing “We Are the Successors of Communism” in front of the Ruins of St. Paul’s, the site of a former Catholic Church, as part of events commemorating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party. The event sparked discussion online among Macau residents about whether religious schools could preserve their religious values and implement their educational mission while conforming to government ideology. Some educators stated they believed that politics should not be brought onto campus, and that patriotism did not equate to loving the Communist Party.

The Catholic Church in Macau, in communion with the Holy See, continued to recognize the Pope as its head. The Vatican appointed the bishop for the diocese.

The Catholic Diocese of Macau continued to run many educational institutions.

Falun Gong practitioners reported they continued to be able to discuss their beliefs openly with Macau residents.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

U.S. Consulate General representatives were unable to visit Macau during the year due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. U.S. Consulate General representatives in Hong Kong, including the Consul General, stressed the importance of religious diversity and religious freedom and discussed religious communities’ relations with their coreligionists on the mainland and in Hong Kong. They raised these points in virtual meetings with civil society representatives, religious leaders, and non-governmental organizations.